AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT AND INDIVIDUAL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN THE CHORAL CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

Assessment in the large choral ensemble music classroom continues to be a widely examined topic among both practicing music educators and music education scholars. This instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) explored the lived experiences with assessment practices as reported by high school choir students and the choir teacher. The research site was a large, suburban, high school choral program in the Southeast United States. Research questions focused on participants' beliefs about assessment, factors that influenced those beliefs such as the role of choir in the school curriculum and culture, and the challenges of assessing choral music students. Data generation methods included observational field notes, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and collection of artifacts. Findings revealed that both musical and nonmusical assessment practices were used to evaluate student learning including participation and attendance-based assessments, a theory curriculum, and performance assessments. Students perceived all assessment practices, musical and nonmusical, to be in support of what they viewed as the primary goal of the choral program, ensemble achievement. That choir participation was positively perceived to be more like an activity and less like an academic class appeared to be a core belief at ATHS, and one that should be further examined in assessment discussions in music education.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family—Catherine, Andrew, Mom, and Dad. I want to especially thank my mother, Barbara, an accomplished music educator, wife, mother and the best Gran. As my first music teacher, you instilled in me a love of music, teaching, and learning at a very young age. You never failed to support me or encourage me even though the most challenging of times. I would not have been able to fulfill my dream of getting a doctorate without the love, support, and willingness to help shown by you and Dad (Rick). I am forever grateful.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CASA	Contextual authentic singing assessment
MCA	Model Cornerstone Assessments
MENC	Music Educators National Conference
NAfME	National Association for Music Education
NCAS	National Core Arts Standards

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For many years, assessment in music education, a field that historically has lacked compulsory standards and curricula, has been the subject of debate among music education professionals. For example, as early as 1968 leading scholars in the field urged music educators to adopt assessment practices that would (a) identify and evaluate student progress, (b) identify and guide talented students, (c) evaluate teacher effectiveness, (d) evaluate the educational process, (e) motivate student learning, (f) establish and maintain standards; and (g) evaluate the results of research (Lehman, 1968, p. 2–3). Whybrew (1971) challenged music educators to develop and improve procedures for assessing individual students and evaluating music performance.

By the mid 1970s, the Sputnik phenomenon had redefined the role of accountability in education and directly impacted noncore subjects, especially music (McClung, 1996). In response to such increased accountability, the need to revisit assessment became a rallying cry for music educators who were intent on developing more intentional processes for curricular, instructional, and administrative decisions (Boyle, 1989). Scholars encouraged music educators to evaluate assessment practices in an effort to hold the music education profession to the same accountability standards as other academic disciplines (Boyle, 1989; Colwell, 1995).

Following the publication of National Standards for Arts Education (MENC, 1994), assessment in music classrooms became a crucial component in determining whether music standards adequately addressed the needs of music students. Those leading the charge for

standards-based instruction and assessment, such as Richard Colwell (1995) and Paul Lehman (2008), encouraged the use of assessment not only to improve student learning, but also to provide valid student data to inform future decisions about evolving music curricula.

The creation of the 1994 standards, both nationally and at the state level, was intended to motivate teachers to teach prescribed concepts and skills and to consider ways to assess music learning; a component of music teaching that may have been overlooked in the past, especially in performance ensembles. In response to the adoption of the National Standards and subsequent educational reforms, *Music Educators Journal* published a special focus issue dedicated to the topic of assessment (Spaeth, 1999). Other MENC publications, such as *Spotlight on Assessment in Music Education* (MENC, 2001) and *Benchmarks in Action: A Guide to Standards-based Assessment in Music Education* (Lindeman, 2007), along with several noteworthy textbooks (Brinson, 1996; Holt & Jordon, 2008; Phillips, 2004) also recommended strategies for adopting valid, reliable, and objective assessment practices. They generally encouraged music teachers to avoid relying on nonmusical criteria (participation and attendance) to assess student achievement.

Still, evidence suggested that teachers continued to rely almost exclusively on nonmusical criteria to assess students in ensemble classes (Kancianic, 2006; Kotora, 2005; McClung, 1996; Russell & Austin, 2010). The 2014 revised National Association for Music Education (NAfME) and the National Core Arts Standards (NCAS) included newly created Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCA). They were piloted in 2015 in select schools and districts. The standards-based MCAs were developed, according to NAfME, "[To] provide an instructional and assessment framework into which teachers integrate their curriculum to help measure student learning" (NAfME, 2016).

MCAs were curriculum embedded tasks that measured student learning through one or more artistic process (creating, performing, and responding). They focused on students' musical experiences and were created to support them in learning the knowledge and skills associated with the tasks. Rubrics, included within the assessments, provided criteria for evaluation that were defined by the National Core Arts Standards (NCAS). MCAs were shown to be valid measurements of student learning that reliably tracked and documented student growth and achievement (Burrack & Parkes, 2018). Still, they were presented as suggestions for music teachers, not mandated by policy.

Currently, NAfME remains committed to the necessity of assessment in music classrooms. It acknowledges that assessment may include diverse methods, but the primary goal should be to measure student learning in order to generate data to be made available to students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the general public.

Current Assessment Practices in Secondary Music Ensemble Classes

Conventional assessment practices. Assessment practices existing in secondary ensemble classes, such as performance assessments, do not easily conform to definitions of conventional or traditional assessment in the general education literature. Therefore, conventional approaches to assessment in music ensembles are those practices that are widely accepted within the closed system of music education. Conventional practices, which include assessment of nonmusical criteria, performance assessment, and traditional pen and paper examinations, typically are accepted as standard practice in music ensemble classrooms.

Even with increasing pressure to provide data and to assess individual music students' skills and knowledge, existing literature shows evidence of prevailing trends toward assessment practices in music classrooms that do not reflect a student-centered, data driven approach to

assessment. Conventional assessment practices in music ensemble classes consistently use noncognitive and nonmusical criteria, such as participation and attendance, to assess and evaluate students in performing ensemble classes (Kotora, 2005; LaCognata, 2011; McCoy, 1988; Russell & Austin, 2010).

Such practices have been the focus of a number of recent investigations. For example, McCoy (1988), LaCognata (2011) and Kotora (2005) all reported a prevalence of ensemble teachers using assessment practices largely based on nonmusical criteria, especially attendance and participation. According to Russell and Austin (2010), though some music teachers incorporated achievement and nonachievement criteria into their grading practices, they assigned greater weight to nonachievement criteria. The least weighted assessments were those involving student practice and written knowledge. They argued that the use of nonachievement criteria, such as reductions in grade for attendance, subjective evaluations of student attitude, and a focus on ensemble performance over individual performance and transfer, indicated a marked lack of sophistication about the process of assessing learning and grading students.

These strategies are concerning due to the inherent subjectivity that exists when assessing students' behavior, effort, and attitude. Even assessing students' attendance, though generally a more objective strategy, fails to measure or report a students' musical understanding and achievement. By continuing to implement nonmusical and nonachievement criteria-based assessments, which remain deeply rooted in the secondary music education culture, music educators not only depreciate overall learning goals, they also negatively influence stakeholders' perceptions of the rigor of school music programs (Aitchison, 1993; Denis, 2018).

Though assessment of nonmusical and nonachievement outcomes remains the most common assessment strategy in music education classrooms, a number of researchers have

identified performance assessment to be at least somewhat prevalent across the country (LaCognata, 2011; McClung, 1996; McCoy, 1991; McQuarrie & Sherwin, 2013; Russell & Austin, 2010). Such assessments, though viewed as an innovative assessment strategy in other disciplines, flow naturally from music education's inherent purpose as a performance-based endeavor. Consequently, performance assessment is embedded into the culture as a means to evaluate both individual performances and group performances and commonly is used as both a formative and summative assessment strategy.

Performance assessment practices include live and recorded singing tests, playing tests, pass-offs, auditions, small group performances, and concert performances. Music educators have traditionally employed a variety of measurement tools to evaluate performance assessments including checklists, rubrics, rating scales, and general impressions based on daily interaction with student performances (Chiodo, 2001; LaCognata, 2011; Russell & Austin, 2010).

Researchers have purported the practice of using performance assessments to be more prevalent in instrumental classes than in choral classes (McCoy, 1988; Russell & Austin, 2010). They suggested that this circumstance might indicate that performance skills are of higher value and more easily assessable in instrumental contexts. They also posited that choral teachers may value community building and the nurturing of a more complex social environment and assign more weight to attitudinal assessments.

Though performance assessments represent a more authentic assessment practice, and though scholars currently are working to develop performance assessment measurement tools that can improve their reliability and validity, they also are reportedly unreliable (Bergee, 2003; Latimer et. al, 2010; Reimer, 2009; Ryan & Costa-Giomi, 2004; Wesolowski et al., 2017; Wesolowski, 2012; and Wesolowski et al., 2018). Still, unlike nonmusical and nonachievement

criteria assessments, performance assessments can provide teachers, students, and stakeholders with data that have the potential to inform teaching and learning in an authentic way. Arguably, the use of valid and reliable measurement tools in performance assessments could generate results with less bias and subjectivity.

Traditional written, or pen and paper exams, constitute another widely used conventional assessment practice. Quizzes, exams, and worksheets have been identified as the most commonly used written assessments in music ensemble classes (Russell & Austin, 2010). These written formats frequently have been used to assess music content knowledge, including theory and history, and music listening. But written assessments are vulnerable to questions of validity. To address such matters, Lehman (2008) suggested that teachers must develop and learn the skills necessary to create appropriate and effective tests; a potentially challenging and time-consuming task.

In sum, nonmusical and nonachievement assessments, performance assessments, and written assessments remain the conventional assessment practices that have shaped, influenced, and in some cases challenged music teachers' approaches to teaching and learning. Existing literature has succeeded in examining these conventional practices and the contexts in which they exist. However, one could argue that what is missing from the assessment literature is a more thorough understanding of the beliefs and values that influence the use and prevalence of these conventional practices, despite recommendations to implement alternative, student-centered, and individualized assessment methods.

Validity, reliability, and fairness concerns. Conventional assessment practices in music ensemble classes are fraught with issues of validity, reliability, and fairness—essential components of effective evaluation. McMillan (2018) discussed validity and its impact on

student motivation, suggesting that teachers should consider the context of assessments and also what has meaning and value within that specific context. He reported that the meaning and value associated with noncognitive and nonmusical assessment practices placed something other than music or achievement at the center of the assessment practices. According to McMillan, if the information inferred about students based on nonachievement criteria are not sound or trustworthy, then the assessment practice likely is not valid.

Concerns have been raised about the validity of performance assessments in choir when assessing students while singing alone because studies reported that singers approach singing differently within the context of a choral ensemble as opposed to solo singing (Daugherty, 2001). These findings suggest the need for choral music teachers to explore innovative ways to assess individual achievement by assessing choristers within the context of the ensemble, where they are phonating and contributing as choral singers, not as soloists.

Reliability, the extent to which assessment practices are dependable, was also a concern when considering the subjective nature of nonachievement and nonmusical assessment practices in the music ensemble classroom. McMillan (2018) discussed the "noise" or errors that impact the reliability of particular assessment practices (p. 86). Therefore, issues of reliability, such as personal biases, human judgement, systematic errors, and contextual influences are likely to emerge in assessment practices that are largely teacher-centered and lacking in criteria used for evaluation.

Fair assessment practices provide students an equal opportunity to show what they have learned. Assessment practices that fail to put students in control of their learning, such as nonmusical criteria assessments, are likely to be considered unfair. When using assessment practices that evaluate students based on their attendance, many factors, including parent and

guardian support, unexpected circumstances, or illness, constitute factors that students are unable to control. Affective assessment practices that evaluate student behavior and participation also involve issues of fairness, including teacher bias or favoritism.

Innovative assessment practices in the music ensemble classroom. Innovative assessment practices are those which are not commonly or widely used and consist of novel methods and approaches to assessing student learning. These innovative practices usually take the form of alternative assessments, any method that differs from traditional written or objective tests, and authentic assessments as the evaluation of students' ability to use knowledge to perform tasks that are similar to what is encountered in real life (McMillan, 2018).

The paradigm shift toward student-centered teaching and learning in education and the recommended use of documentation that objectively demonstrates student achievement has the potential to promote the increased use and development of more innovative assessment practices. Ideally, innovative assessment practices in music education not only embody a student-centered approach, they also encourage 21st century skills and dispositions in students. Communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking are a few such skills that are potentially reinforced through the use of innovative assessment practices. Innovative assessment practices also cultivate skills in media and technology literacy.

Innovative assessment practices, currently existing in ensemble classes, have been reported to include projects, presentations, journals, portfolios, and the use of self and peer assessments (Russell & Austin, 2010). Of the previously listed strategies, portfolios have been discussed in numerous practitioner articles (Asmus, 1999; Goolsby, 1995; Scott, 2012) but have appeared less frequently in the research literature (Dirth, 2000; McCall, 2006).

Portfolios are a collection of student work systematically documented to demonstrate learning and growth (McMillan, 2018). In the ensemble classroom, portfolios might include recordings, reflections, concert programs, written assessments, and artifacts demonstrating the students' engagement with and understanding of the learning tasks and experiences in the ensemble class. Goolsby (1995) suggested that portfolio assessment allowed students to, "Progress at individual rates, to provide teachers with evidence of student progress, and to provide an outlet for motivated students who wish to achieve beyond the standards" (p. 43). The strength of portfolios lies in their ability to demonstrate mastery and growth as a collaborative experience with music, which communicates to stakeholders the value of the process of music making and learning in addition to the product.

MCAs for ensembles, piloted by NAfME and a team of researchers, were developed using an innovative approach to assessment that promotes the use of authentic assessment practices, more focused on the individual learner. Authentic tasks and accompanying rubrics were designed to assess composing, improvising, performing and responding to music within the structure of traditional and nontraditional ensemble classes. For each strand, students were compelled to participate in each of the artistic processes. These tasks were created to be sequential, completed over time, and to "reflect what musicians do in the real world" (Burrack & Parkes, 2018, p. 70).

Ensemble MCAs included performance tasks that required students to: (a) hone their listening and evaluation skills, (b) evaluate and select repertoire, (c) develop and implement a rehearsal plan, (d) present a performance, and (e) respond and reflect on musical performances. Just as professional musicians use various strategies to evaluate practice and performance, MCAs were designed to present a variety of approaches of assessment (self-evaluation, peer

evaluation, reflection, written assignment, and performance) to students that provided meaningful feedback using reliable and valid measurement tools (Holcomb, 2018).

The researchers suggested that the ensemble MCAs were an attempt to shift the ensemble paradigm from one focused on group performance to one focused on individual student learning. In this paradigm, the teacher serves as a facilitator through which music literacy and a heightened understanding of the artistic processes for performing combine to cultivate musical independence. These authentic tasks were also created to encourage skills and dispositions such as collaboration, inquisitiveness, flexibility, goal setting, and perseverance (Burrack & Parkes, 2018).

The authors of the ensemble MCAs were seemingly aware of the implicit fairness and equity issues that existed in the conventional approaches to assessment used in ensembles classes. They stated that the process of selecting, rehearsing, and presenting musical performances and responding, within the framework provided by the MCAs "endures regardless of musical style or the role of musical notation" (Burrack & Parkes, 2018, p. 71).

Using technology to assess students individually represented another innovative performance assessment approach. These assessment practices may incorporate components of conventional performance assessments because students engaged in performing music, in this case, singing. However, unlike conventional performance assessments, where students typically were performing alone, these individualized singing assessments were designed to capture individual student performances within the context of an ensemble performance. Smartphones or tablets were used to record students singing in real time. The recordings were then uploaded to a data collection site and were evaluated either formatively or summatively using a validated rubric for teacher feedback, student self-assessment, or peer assessment.

These innovative singing assessments evaluated individual student contributions to the ensemble in a way that was authentic to the context in which they are accustomed to rehearsing and performing. They also took into consideration sensitive issues of performance anxiety and social pressures that have potentially affected individual students when performing alone or in small groups, especially when the performance was intended as a high-stakes evaluation.

Currently, web-based and digital programs, such as *SmartMusic* are used for individual performance assessments. Technological advances continue to provide access to information and resources that are readily available to teachers and students, which should allow for the development of innovative ways to gather data, assess, and measure student learning. Music educators are now able to assess sizeable populations, from various locations, with greater efficiency and accuracy. Still, one might argue that the use of technology in assessment has perhaps become a new way to do an old thing (performance assessment).

The increased use of innovative assessment practices likely will generate pedagogical and philosophical dialogues that will seek to reevaluate our definition of student achievement within the framework of a student-centered approach to teaching and learning. As researchers seek to develop more efficient and accessible assessment practices, such practices could eventually be embraced as conventional. Because of this circumstance, it likely will be necessary for future teachers to acquire the skills and strategies necessary for developing and implementing innovative assessment practices that assess various forms of musical experiences using a variety of assessment formats.

Assessment Challenges in Music Education

The unique challenges of music teaching and learning have created tensions between administrators, teachers, policymakers, and especially among music educators about the best

assessment practices and procedures. For example, scholars have suggested that music educators generally struggle to find common ground on issues about goal setting and curricular choices. They reported that such controversies have contributed to an endless variety of views among music educators about the nature of assessment (Lehman, 2008). Such disparity, combined with the subjective nature of music teaching and learning, has impeded attempts to develop fair and reliable assessment measures even amid the data-driven, standards-based approach that is currently dominating the educational landscape (Colwell, 2008).

There remains a belief, pervasive among many in the music education profession, that music learning is difficult to assess, which creates a culture where "objectifying music" is shunned (Asmus, 1999, p. 19). National education policies, such as *No Child Left Behind* and now *Every Student Succeeds Act*, recognize music as a core academic subject and part of a child's well-rounded education. However, the current assessment practices utilized by music educators and the noncompulsory nature of the national and state music standards fail to argue conclusively for music's inclusion in the core curriculum (Scott, 2012).

Logistical challenges, such as the number of students taught, time constraints, work load, and administrator support and guidance have been frequently cited as factors that influence music educators in making decisions about assessment (Ferm Almqvist et al., 2017; Lehman, 2008; Russell & Austin, 2010). Additional challenges, unique to ensemble teaching and learning, include lack of professional development on the topic of assessment, discrepancies in contact time with students, lack of strategies for assessing individual students in large classes, addressing parent and student apathy, and a shortage of available resources for collecting, managing, and storing assessment artifacts and data (Kotora, 2005; Shuler, 1996).

As a result of conversations surrounding assessment and the evaluation of current assessment practices in music education, researchers suggested that music teachers and music teacher educators consider the equity and legal issues surrounding the current assessment practices (Russell, 2011). The first step in addressing issues of fairness and equity is for music teachers to be transparent about their grading and assessment procedures to avoid perceptions of favoritism and subjectivity in grading (Harrison et al., 2013).

The widespread use of nonachievement criteria for assessment in music education may leave music educators vulnerable to challenges from students and parents, including legal challenges. In a review of case law litigation involving challenges of assessment practices, Russell (2011) discussed implications for music educators and issues of legality and fairness in the use of nonachievement criteria grading. He suggested that music educators should adopt grading policies that give greater weight to achievement assessments. He also recommended that music educators create and implement fair and appropriate processes for making up work and contesting grades. Through adequate documentation and communication of grading policies, music educators could potentially avoid legal challenges and ensure that students are being graded and assessed in a fair and equitable way.

Issues of fairness and transparency have also contributed to a lack of understanding and favoritism in the grading and assessment practices of music educators (Harrison et al., 2013). Instead of learning goals and standards driving assessment strategies, assessment became the enforcer, used to motivate students toward compliance and attendance instead of being utilized to inform, promote, and document student learning. Therefore, assessment, when poorly implemented and planned, has the potential to restrict the creativity of students through teacher-

centered instruction and decision making that is consequential to students' individual growth and musical development (Denis, 2018).

Identification of the Research Problem

Music educators largely strive to cultivate independent musicians who will be life-long learners and lovers of music. Student motivation, external perceptions, and student learning and engagement are subject to being influenced by the decisions teachers make about assessment. By considering a broader range of skills and knowledge, exploring innovative and alternative assessment practices, and offering more valid feedback, music educators can facilitate student achievement while informing instruction in a legal and equitable way. Research into best practices for assessing music learning, particularly into ways in which individual students are being assessed in an ensemble context, is vital for moving the profession toward fair, efficient, and reliable assessment practices.

A disconnect exists in the music education profession because many of the assessment strategies that are commonly used by music teachers are not investigated in the assessment literature; while many of the strategies and approaches that have been examined in the literature are not widely used in music classrooms (McQuarrie & Sherwin, 2013). This disconnect, among other factors, have created tensions between music educators' values and the implementation of assessment in the ensemble classroom (Russel & Austin, 2010).

The body of literature on assessment in secondary music ensemble classes generally has relied on descriptive and quantitative modes of inquiry, using questionnaires and surveys to determine assessment strategies and teachers' attitudes toward assessment (Kotora, 2005; LaCognata, 2011; McClung, 1996; McCoy, 1988, 1991; Russell & Austin, 2010). Though a number of studies have examined teachers' use and perceptions of assessment in music

education (Kancianic, 2006; McCoy, 1991; McClung, 1996; Talley, 2005; Tracy, 2002; Russell & Austin, 2010), fewer studies have investigated student perceptions of those assessment practices (Aitchison, 1993; Kotora, 2005; McClung, 1996). Furthermore, the existing research fails to address the thought processes of teachers when planning and implementing assessment practices in their classrooms.

The lived experiences of this study's participants and the findings generated from the field sought to contribute to a growing body of knowledge that seeks to understand the values, beliefs, and perceptions of those engaging with and making decisions about assessment in music classrooms. Therefore, the purpose of this instrumental case study was to examine student and teacher perceptions of and experiences with assessment practices in a secondary choral ensemble class and to identify factors and challenges influencing the participants' values and beliefs about assessment.

To do so, I used a case study methodology to collect and analyze data in order to address three primary research questions:

1. How do participants perceive, value, and experience assessment practices in the choral classroom?
2. What factors influenced participants' perceptions, values, and experiences of assessment in the choral classroom?
3. What challenges do choral teachers and students encounter when implementing and engaging with assessment in the choral music classroom?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Assessment in music education is both a relevant and timely issue that has been examined through various modes of inquiry. There exists a body of work that has examined perceptions of assessment in music education, factors that influenced assessment in music education, assessment practices used in music education, individualized assessment strategies, and the use of technology in assessing music students. The following components, perceptions, and dimensions of music assessment informed the design of the present study.

Perceptions of Assessment in Music Education

Perceptions of assessment in music classrooms, along with the perceptions of music's role in the school curriculum, have constituted significant influences that have impacted the use of assessment. Perceptions of assessment practices in music education centered around the perceived purposes and goals of music education, its place in the academic landscape, and the suitability of current assessment practices for measuring student achievement (Conway & Jeffers, 2004; Duerksen,1995; Harrison et al., 2013; Hill, 1999; Kotora, 2005; McClung, 1996; McCoy, 1991; McCreary, 2001)

McCoy (1991) investigated the assessment and grading practices of 97 band and choir teachers in Illinois and compared them with grading procedures proposed by principals. McCoy reported that despite the principals' preference for grading systems that assigned the greatest weight to psychomotor and cognitive criteria, such as performance technique, sight-reading, and memorization, teachers most frequently used nonmusical criteria, such as attendance and

participation, to determine grades. Teachers and administrators disagreed in the ways they perceived the value of attendance and behavior in assessment practices and procedures. McCoy noted that the differences identified between the two groups reinforced longstanding tensions that have existed between administrators' values and music teachers' assessment practices.

In a review of assessment policies and procedures in music education, Duerksen (1995) concluded that music educators were influenced by community perception and public opinion about the purpose for music education programs. He contended that music educators valued product (performance) over the process of evaluating and improving student achievement. He stated:

> The crowd's judgment of the band show at half-time, the judge's rating earned by the choir at a festival, the service club's evaluation of the noontime performance by the show choir, and the parents' and teachers' satisfaction with the music presented at a PTA meeting demonstrated the public's perceptions and expectations for musical achievement. (p. 57)

Duerksen suggested that the same attention and accountability should be given to connecting the public assessment of ensemble achievement to evaluating individual student learning.

McClung (1996) surveyed high school choral teachers, principals, and students who participated in the 1995 Georgia All-State Chorus to examine the assessment and grading practices in high school choir. Results revealed that music teachers preferred to grade students using performance tests and classroom participation. Those practices were perceived to have influenced the public's perception of the educational status and value of school choral music when compared to the academic status given to core academic classes. Principals (31%) responded that grades in choral music were perceived as equally valuable to core academics, but

only 18% of the principals agreed that choral music classes were afforded equal status with core academic subjects. Student participants reported that written assessments were more frequently associated with other academic subjects, not chorus, indicating a need for more rigorous and academic focused assessment strategies in choir. Students viewed assessment and grades as powerful motivators in other academic disciplines.

McClung suggested that grades assigned in choral music classrooms should be designed and implemented in a way that accurately reflected the comprehensive musical achievement of students. He concluded that objective assessment of learning may provide opportunities for choral teachers to offer evidence to principals, students, parents, and colleagues, of the value of student achievement in choir.

Hill (1999) surveyed band students, band directors, and administrators in Mississippi to describe their assessment procedures, attitudes, and grading policies. He found that nonmusical criteria were perceived to be important for band grades, but they were also perceived to be inappropriate for measuring and evaluating student achievement by students and administrators. Student participants agreed that grades were perceived as rewards or punishments and they were motivated to earn good grades, even though those grades were most often determined by nonachievement assessment procedures. All participants agreed that pen-and-paper tests, sight reading, and portfolios were suitable for assessing music learning. In contrast, effective assessment of nonmusical criteria was not identified as being suitable. A large percentage of *A* grades were endorsed by both student and parent participants, though they determined many of those criteria to be unsuitable for measuring student learning.

Talley (2005) investigated the perceptions of elementary general music teachers in Michigan toward assessment. Her findings revealed that while most of the teachers held positive

views about assessment, many either did not assess their students at all or did not frequently assess their students. Another notable finding from this study was that adapting teacher's instruction was the highest rated reason for using assessment and data resulting from assessment. In other words, teachers viewed assessment as more beneficial for themselves than for the students. This study shed light on the contradiction between music teachers' values and actions. Despite the teachers' positive attitudes toward assessments, they were reluctant to regularly implement them.

In a study of Ohio, Kotora (2005) surveyed high school choral teachers to identify their assessment strategies and to investigate the rationale for their use. He cited the teachers' frustrations that colleagues, students, and parents believed that having fun and getting a good grade took precedence over student achievement. Students and parents were also shown to be apathetic toward assessment in music classrooms. One participant said, "There is pressure or a general expectation among the kids, parents and administration that the choir grades should be high. I struggled with being too tough or too easy" (p. 75).

Participants also cited time, full teaching schedules, large class sizes, and the struggle to balance individual instruction with group instruction as frustrating or challenging aspects of assessing students in choir. Kotora (2005) posited that the absence of guidelines and clarity for assessing students, combined with the frustrations that choral teachers experience when attempting to assess their students, provided a rationale for further study to identify best practices and to gain insight from choral teachers in the field.

McCreary (2001) examined the assessment practices and perceptions of secondary school instrumental students in Hawaii and compared the perceptions of students and teachers about assessment. Findings revealed that younger students valued assessment more than older students.

Students from smaller classes perceived that more weight was given to playing tests than students in larger classes. Teachers (80%) and students (93%) agreed that alternative assessment was rarely or never used in the instrumental classroom with teachers favoring more traditional assessment practices such as paper and pencil tests, practice logs, attendance, and attitude. McCreary suggested the need for teacher training in the development and implementation of nontraditional assessment practices and for improved communication between teachers and students regarding assessment in the music classroom.

Conway and Jeffers (2004) explored parent, teacher, and student perceptions of assessment practices through an action research project that was situated in a beginning instrumental music class. The researcher and teacher collaborated to create an instrumental music education report card that communicated detailed feedback to parents about their child's musical development and achievement, based on an individual recording submitted by the student. However, the report card did not generate a letter grade.

Results indicated most parents were delighted to receive the detailed report card, though some parents desired specific feedback from teachers that would facilitate their ability to compare their child's progress to that of their peers. Some indicated a preference for a standard letter grade and less feedback. The researchers suggested that utilizing different types of assessments that evaluate an array of skills might appease some of the negative perceptions of the assessment procedure. The feedback communicated from assessments of musical skills and knowledge was valuable to both students and parents. Students were overall highly supportive of the assessment practice and the reporting.

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study was the impact of action research on the teacher. Though he was a veteran of 35 years, he had never intentionally planned his instruction

or assessment practices around the sequential development of musical skills. He also valued the collaborative approach that involved parents and students generating feedback that assisted him in refining and improving the assessment tool.

Factors that influence teacher values and beliefs about assessment. Strongly held values about assessment in music education are the result of both external and internal forces that influenced the decisions of music teachers and their approaches to assessment. External factors, such as administrator expectations, district policies, and public perception of music education have been identified as factors that influenced the type of assessment practices found in music (Colwell, 1998; Russel & Austin, 2010). Internal factors included lack of training, support, knowledge, and confidence that affected teachers use of assessment in performance-based music classrooms (Hanzlik, 2001; Kotora, 2005; Russel & Austin, 2010; Simanton, 2000;).

Kotora (2005) found that teachers were marginally influenced by external forces such as local district requirements, state mandates, and the national standards for music. High school participants indicated that personal choice overwhelmingly guided their assessment practices more than any external expectation. Choral methods professors were also surveyed to determine the assessment practices being taught to pre-service music educators and their reasons for teaching them. Similar to the high school teachers, the choral methods professors taught particular assessment strategies largely based on personal preference. Kotora suggested the need for further research to address the feelings of frustration and lack of training experienced by choral teachers in this study.

Personal attributes of music educators, such as training and experience, along with the teacher's personal teaching philosophy, also influenced assessment decisions (Hanzlik, 2001; Simanton, 2000). In a study of high school band directors in the US, Simanton (2000) concluded

that band size, MENC region, experience, and educational background significantly influenced assessment practices. Teachers with more experience, advanced education, and those that taught small bands were more likely to use individualized and authentic assessment procedures.

Hanzlik (2001) examined the assessment practices of Iowa high school band directors and explored variables that had an effect on the teachers' attitude toward assessment. Two categories of variables were analyzed—personal and institutional. Unlike Simanton (2000), none of the personal variables (gender, age, educational background, and teaching experience) produced a significant effect on the attitude score of the participants. Grading policies, instructional support, school size, and class time were external factors or institutional variables that were also examined.

Results revealed that school size was a significant predictor of participants' attitudes toward assessment, with smaller schools showing a significant effect. Hanzlik (2001) suggested that because many of the teachers in smaller schools were typically beginning teachers, new ideas, excitement, and newly formed values from pre-service training likely influenced their attitudes toward assessment.

Administrative support and guidance were frequently cited reasons music teachers undervalued assessment and lacked the confidence to implement stronger assessment strategies (Kotora, 2005; McClung, 1996; Russell & Austin, 2010). Though music grades were most often weighted equally with other courses, administrators tended to offer little to no guidance in adopting valid assessment strategies for music educators (Russell & Austin, 2010). Russell and Austin found that administrative guidance was significantly associated with music teachers' use of nonmusical and noncognitive criteria, such as participation and attendance. The more

administrative guidance teachers received the less likely they were to assign greater weight to those assessment practices.

The researchers suggested that many administrators would likely be mindful of potential legal and fairness issues commonly associated with assessment practices that can subjectively evaluate students' attitude and participation. They concluded that the lack of training and support from administrators have created a "culture of benign neglect" that has traditionally provided no consequences for those teachers who continue to endorse and utilize unfair and unreliable assessment practices (Russell & Austin, 2010, p. 48).

Examinations of Assessment Practices in Music Education

A number of descriptive studies identified the assessment practices of music educators. Fewer studies have examined specific assessment practices. Authentic assessment, particularly the use of performance assessment, has been a popular topic for researchers seeking to examine specific assessment practices, likely because of its prevalence in music classrooms.

Authentic assessment. Gulikers et al. (2004) suggested five dimensions to consider when designing and implementing authentic assessments: (a) task; (b) physical context; (c) social context; (d) result and form; and (e) criteria. They defined the authenticity of a task by its "degree of resemblance to the criterion situation" (Gulikers et al., 2004, p. 5), but others believe authenticity is achieved if the assessment relates to student learning in ways that are authentic to the educational context (Popham, 2002).

In a position paper, Edward P. Asmus (1999) argued that music educators have an added advantage over other disciplines in using authentic assessment because their students frequently perform music, an act that is explicitly public. Authentic assessment, in this regard, supported teaching, learning, and evaluating that existed on a continuum. In music education settings,

authentic assessment tasks required students to demonstrate and apply musical skills and knowledge in ways that were authentic to the context and daily activities experienced in the music classroom (Scott, 2004).

Silveira (2013) posited that authentic assessments provided students the chance to learn not only what they can do now, but what they can achieve. He also argued that with recent, national legislative and educational trends and increased accountability in schools, "it is incumbent upon music educators to document and demonstrate student progress in an authentic manner" (Silveira, 2013, p. 23).

Portfolios, journals, and other alternative assessment strategies used in music ensemble classrooms have been investigated with favorable findings that resulted in increased student accountability, improved student achievement and growth, informed instruction, and better communication (Dirth, 2000; Goolsby, 1999; Robinson et al., 2010). Brummett and Haywood (1997) evaluated the use of authentic assessment in a middle school general music classroom. The theoretical framework consisted of the following five components: (a) interactive outcomes; (b) interactive evaluative strategies; (c) teacher journal sheets; (d) "process" folios for classes and individuals; and (e) musical progress measure - a reporting instrument (Brummett & Haywood, 1997, p. 5). The teacher in this study reported favorable results that indicated overall increases in students understanding of musical knowledge, creativity, independence, and vocal skills as a result of the authentic assessment approach to music teaching and learning. Practical suggestions were given for additional ways to implement and expand the framework presented in the study.

Performance assessment. Performance assessments, an authentic assessment strategy, were frequently examined in the music assessment literature. McMillan (2018) defined

performance-based assessment as “one in which the teacher observes and makes a judgment about the student’s demonstration of a skill or competency in creating a product, constructing a response, or making a presentation” (p. 196). The majority of the performance assessment literature in music education focused on quantitatively examining the validity and reliability of musical performance assessment evaluations within the context of solo performance (Abeles, 1973; Bergee, 1988; Ciorba & Smith, 2009; Russell, 2015; Wesolowski et al., 2018;) and large-group ensemble performance (Cooksey, 1977; Latimer, 2007; Latimer et al., 2010; Norris & Borst, 2007; Wesolowski, 2012).

Scholars recognized that music educators were assessing, diagnosing, and correcting performance daily but they failed to document student learning and progress or to incorporate individual assessment into their grading policies (Wesolowski, 2012). Because of the subjective nature of music and musical performance, rubrics or checklists were suggested to develop a set of criteria for clearly communicating expectations for student performance.

Deluca and Bolden (2014) posited that incorporating criterion-based performance assessment into music instruction could “significantly support music learning and honor both expressive and technical aspects of performance” (p. 76). Boyle and Radocy (1987) suggested that performance assessments could be significantly improved through assessment measurements that sought to increase objectivity. Performance assessments required teachers to shift to a more student-centered approach, and their success depended on the teacher’s ability to develop authentic tasks that enabled students to demonstrate knowledge and skills (Fischer & King, 1995).

Wesolowski (2012) discussed the complexity of music performance assessment and the deficiencies associated with its ability to document individual student achievement in a summative or diagnostic way. He suggested:

> If assessments in music performance are implemented with a purely summative or diagnostic purpose, we lose the richness of instructional value that could be possible. By implementing more formative methods of assessment, such as the rubric, music educators can better monitor and improve student learning as well as shape their instruction in a tangible, sequential manner in response to what they discover. (p. 37)

McPherson and Thompson (1998) reviewed literature on performance assessment and presented a model to guide future studies in this area. They identified interacting factors that may influence the reliability of performance assessments, including contextual considerations, nonmusical and musical factors, measurement instruments, and criteria. The judge or evaluator was shown to be the most important variable when attempting to control for and identify bias in performance assessments. The authors concluded that performance assessments are inherently subjective, and they highlighted the importance of a valid and reliable measurement tool, such as a rubric or checklist, when evaluating these assessments in the ensemble classroom.

Singing assessment. Several scales and assessment tools for measuring singing accuracy have been examined by researchers, particularly those measures designed to quantify and evaluate the singing tasks of children (Brophy, 1997; Salvador, 2010). Rutkowski's (1990) *Singing Voice Development Measure* (SVDM) has been studied most frequently by researchers. The purpose of the scale was to identify the steps children go through on their journey to achieving singing accuracy and to provide music teachers with a consistent tool to measure and report the development of a child's singing voice. The scale reflected Rutkowski's view of

singing as a developmental skill that required time and maturity and one that is influenced by contextual factors such as singing in small groups or individually, the use of text or a neutral syllable, and the tonal requirements of the exercise.

Existing literature about singing assessments focused on measurement tools and processes for assessing individual sight-singing performance rather than ensemble performance (Demorest, 1998; Henry & Demorest, 1994; Henry, 2011). Although components of sight-singing assessments were valuable to the use of a contextual, authentic singing assessment (CASA) in this study, no studies existed that examined strategies for assessing individual choral singing within the context of an ensemble.

Assessing Individual Students in the Ensemble Classroom

Large class sizes and enrollment in music ensembles were frequently cited as factors that inhibited music teachers from developing and implementing individualized assessment in music classroom (Kotora, 2005; McClung, 1996; Russell & Austin, 2010). Music teachers, particularly ensemble teachers, typically relied on comments to the whole class or ensemble feedback from outside evaluators to provide information about their students. Pellegrino et al. (2015) suggested that such feedback, though potentially informative, is not as valuable for assessing individual musical growth.

Scott (1998) proposed the use of a Tiered Evaluation System (TES) to assess individual students in an ensemble. Grades in this system were based on individual achievement and effort as students moved through self-paced levels of technical and musical requirements. In the context of an instrumental classroom, the TES allowed the teacher to assess students of various skill levels and achievement using musical performance criteria designed to represent varying levels of difficulty. Each of these levels included technical, musical, and repertoire requirements

that were appropriately challenging. Though this strategy proved to be time intensive, students were highly motivated to improve based on the evidence and feedback provided by the evaluation system. The system also provided an objective measure of student achievement and growth at all levels and identified skills in which students lacked competency.

Demorest (1998) examined the effect of individual testing on beginning and advanced high school choir students' sight-singing skills. Randomly selected participants, placed in experimental groups, participated in three individuals sight singing tests, occurring throughout one semester. The control group received group instruction alone while the experimental group received regular individual testing along with group instruction. Results indicated significantly greater improvement in individual sight-singing performance of a major melody for participants in the experimental group. The author suggested that not only did individual testing improve achievement, but it provided evidence for and documented individual student progress.

Simanton (2000) surveyed high school band directors to identify their current assessment and grading practices, local perceptions of those practices, and differences in their practices as influenced by school policy and teacher variables. He reported that 18% of the participants did not assess individual student performance at all. Of those that did report that they assessed individual students, approximately 35% of participants assessed students during class and 30% assessed students outside of the ensemble rehearsal time. Participants reported using audio recorders, video recorders, and computers for individual assessment. However, most participants (63%) reported using quizzes and journals to assess students individually.

Portfolio assessments were regularly cited as an effective strategy for gathering and quantifying data for individual students in the music ensemble (Asmus, 1999; Burrack, 2002; Goolsby, 1995: Scott, 2012; Wesolowski, 2015). Burrack (2002) investigated the use of portfolio

assessment and documented his experience with the Arts PROPEL program in Iowa. Instrumental students in this program were expected to submit audio recordings, listen to their recording with an instructor who was providing feedback, complete a self-assessment form, and then place all of their materials into portfolio. Their portfolio was maintained throughout their schooling beginning in fifth grade and was assessed quarterly through high school. Student reflections of the portfolio assessment indicated that students developed a more insightful musical understanding through the assessments. Students were also able to better understand the relationship of their individual part to the whole ensemble.

Tracy (2002) examined the assessment practices of high school choral music teachers from the Southern Division of MENC to determine their assessment practices, issues that impacted those practices, and strategies for gathering and quantifying individual student data in a large group setting. Survey responses revealed that effort, attitude, and ability to sing with others were highly ranked as skills and attributes important for individual assessment. However, participants most frequently used in-rehearsal observation, attendance, and individual/small group performances to assess students individually. Participants' personal philosophies were cited as the most influential factor impacting their assessment practices and values of assessment.

Crochet and Green (2012) posited that an additional key element to growth is the need to document and evaluate individual students' skill and understanding throughout their time in a musical ensemble. In response to internship work samples (IWS) that were required for preservice teachers at the authors' institution, strategies such as recording and submitting individual performance assessments, *SmartMusic* assignments, and student clickers for selected response questions emerged as assessment strategies designed to fulfill the individual data requirement for the IWS. Interns reported that an added benefit to individualized assessment was

improved performance of individual students, which resulted in better overall ensemble performance and increased motivation.

Wesolowski (2015) studied the challenges ensemble teachers encounter when assessing students with varying levels of performance achievement. He proposed a growth target assessment system. In this system, student growth was defined as the change in student achievement as demonstrated by differences in data (e.g., pre and post-test). Customized achievement goals were created for each individual student based upon their pre-test scores. Objectives, benchmarks, and learning targets were developed within an approach that enabled the assessment of individual student growth while still allowing for meaningful instruction in ensemble music performance.

Wesolowski (2015) acknowledged that there were concerns with the time considerations involved in implementing this individualized assessment system. He maintained that the growth target systems can accommodate for differences in individual student ability and achievement "while promoting fairness and equity in grading without sacrificing the validity of scores" (p.44).

Technology and Assessment in Music Classrooms

Advances in technology have allowed access to personal devices and recording technology that is more readily available than ever before. The availability and accessibility of technology in the music classroom offered a unique opportunity for music educators to create and implement innovative approaches to individual assessment. In a position piece, Silveira & Gavin (2016) encouraged the use of recordings as a way to facilitate and promote skills needed for self-assessment. Goolsby (1999) suggested that music educators should practice and communicate procedures and expectations for using any recording or technology in which students record themselves and self-assess.

Students in 21st century schools were identified as products of the digital age because they have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using portable, personal, and smart technology. According to Prensky (2001) these 'digital natives', as he identified them, appeared to process information differently from those of their parents and grandparents, whom he identified as 'digital immigrants.' Prensky (2001) argued that "the single biggest problem facing education today is that our 'Digital Immigrant' instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language" (p. 2).

Early in the digital age, there was debate among education scholars about the suitability of technology for use in classroom assessment. Cuban et al. (2001) argued that while time and money has been devoted to the integration of technological software and equipment, little evidence has been recorded that this technology has improved teaching and learning. Contrastingly, Becker and Riel (2000) posited that when teachers have training, understanding, and experience using technology, they can be a useful and effective instructional tool. Russell and Sorge (1999) indicated that the integration of technology with learning increased students' attitudes toward school, improved critical thinking, and reinforced problem-solving skills.

Reese and Rimington (2000) conducted a study that described the use of technology in music schools in Illinois, identified professional development and training need, and identified the type of software that teachers were using in the classroom. A majority of teachers (65%) indicated that they used a computer in teaching music. However, a small percentage of teachers indicated that they used computers during instructional time (26% of general music teachers, 21% of choral teachers, and 16% of instrumental teachers). Of the teachers that reported using a computer in their classroom, the most common uses were for administrative and communicative

tasks. None of the participants in the study indicated that they used technology to assist them in assessment, an indication of the study taking place before software, such as *SmartMusic,* and personal devices were widely accessible.

More recently, the effects of technology-based programs such as *SmartMusic* on motivation, self-efficacy, and achievement have indicated mixed results. Glenn and Fitzgerald (2002) reported that the use of *SmartMusic* by applied music students increased the frequency of repetitive practice but failed to produce any improvements in musicianship. Whereas, a study conducted by Flanigan (2008) examined the effectiveness of *SmartMusic* on the intonation and rhythmic accuracy of college brass players. Results revealed a significant increase in musicality after four weeks of practicing with *SmartMusic* even though there was not a significant difference in the intonation and rhythmic accuracy of the performances. Participants indicated that they had an overall positive experience with the software.

Gurley (2012) examined the effectiveness of the *SmartMusic* practice and assessment software with middle-school and high-school band students in Texas. The study compared and analyzed the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the program. Survey results revealed that overall, middle-school aged students had a higher level of approval with *SmartMusic*, a higher degree of satisfaction with the program when they practiced, and a higher level of preference to practice with the program than the high school students. All students reported an increased understanding of self-evaluation.

Nielson (2011) surveyed K-12 music educators who were members of MENC and taught either general, choral, or instrumental music and examined their attitudes toward the use of technology to assess music learning along with the types of assessment tools they were using. Results suggested teachers' attitudes towards technology and assessment practices were positive

and that school and teacher factors, such as professional development requirements, had little influence on their perceptions of technology-assisted tools. The most commonly used types of technology-assisted tools were music notation software (70.5 %) and digital recording devices (51.9%). Web-based assessments, interactive white boards, and electronic portfolios were also used in the classroom, but less frequently than the aforementioned tools. The author noted that participants were using technology for daily instruction more frequently than for assessment purposes. Participants also preferred to use technology to assess performance skills rather than content knowledge.

Advances in the capabilities of personal devices, smart phones, and other technologies have afforded people the opportunity to create audio and video recordings inexpensively and with ease. However, a study of the potential for formative assessment purposes through the use of audio and video technology in music education suggested that music teachers are not using these available technological capabilities as frequently or effectively as could be possible (Fautley, 2013). When teachers in Fautley's qualitative study recorded their students, it was typically as a summative assessment at the end of a lesson or unit and was reviewed by only the teacher. Participants cited lack of time as a reason for not providing feedback or sharing the video excerpts with the students. Participants also indicated differences in how students perceived and engaged with audio and video recording. One participant noted that when introducing video recordings to students they quickly became embarrassed and anxious, putting "uneasy pressure" on students (p. 36).

Conclusion

In sum, these studies suggest that a significant body of research has been dedicated to identifying and examining the assessment practices of music educators. However, due to their

design, most of the studies did not thoroughly explore the why and how of music assessment through the voices and lived experiences of students, teachers, and other music education stakeholders. This qualitative perspective could provide additional insight, from a particular viewpoint, to previous findings. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine teacher and student experiences with various assessment practices in a secondary, choral classroom to provide context for the participants' values and beliefs about assessment.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter explains the methodological choices employed in examining the assessment practices of a secondary choral classroom and participant perceptions of those practices. In this chapter I describe the research design, research site, and the participants. I detail the methods used for data generation, data analysis, interpretation, and validation. My role and subjectivity as a researcher along with the limitations of the study are also discussed.

Case Study Research

A case study methodology (Stake, 1995) was used to investigate assessment practices as they existed in a real-life context. More specifically, this study was an instrumental case study because its purpose was to investigate a key topic or concern about a single case that will lead to understandings and possible assertions about the stated topic. The real-world use of various assessment practices in the choral classroom was the key topic or concern investigated in the current study. Representativeness of this particular case, through the use of multiple data sources, was considered when presenting findings and making any generalizations to the larger population of choral programs (Maxwell, 2013). By situating myself in the naturalistic and interactive learning environment, the case study methodology allowed me to create a real-life portrayal of the case and to use the data collected in the field to explore the key, instrumental focus of the study.

Case studies are purposeful, bounded by time and place, with the goal of investigating a topic within a specific context (Maxwell, 2013). I bound the case by place (a secondary choral

classroom), time (6 months of instruction), and context (use and perceptions of various assessment practices). The purpose was to examine large ensemble assessment within the complex conditions that exist in the classroom using multiple data sources.

I chose to use Stake (1995) as the case study methodologist based on the purpose of the study, my role as a participant researcher, and my constructivist approach to presenting findings. By interpreting the data through a constructivist lens and the belief that knowledge is constructed through social interpretations and experiences, I constructed what Stake described as a clearer and more sophisticated reality of, in this case, assessment practices in the choral classroom. The research report represents multiple views and perspectives and presents readers with data for making their own generalizations.

The following interactive process, as suggested by Stake, guided the methodology for the present study: (a) data gathering, (b) data analysis and interpretation, (c) triangulation, and (d) writing the report. Stake called on those who are responsible for interpretation to be "in the field, making observations, exercising subjective judgment, analyzing and synthesizing, all the while realizing their own consciousness" (p. 41). This design therefore sought to explore the human experience and to embrace subjectivity in an attempt to understand the phenomenon of assessment in the choral classroom through prolonged interaction in the field.

Research Site

Sampling and access. I used a purposeful sampling approach in this study. I deliberately chose a particular choral program and participants that could provide data uniquely relevant to the purpose and goals of the present study (Maxwell, 2013). Since the purpose of the study was to examine assessment practices, I chose a choral program in which various forms of assessment were being used. It was also important that I chose a site in which the choir teacher, school

administration, and school district leadership were willing to grant me access to the students during the school day.

Finally, my relationship to the choral program as their collaborative pianist and my rapport with the teacher and students was an asset in gaining access. At the time I conducted this research I had been working with this choral program for two years and had collaborated with the teacher previously in implementing an assessment strategy (CASA) with her students.

The high school. This instrumental case study took place in a suburban, Southeastern public high school choral program in the United States. Allen Thomas High School (ATHS) is situated in a city with a general population of approximately 100,000 residents that is near a university of approximately 40,000 students. According to NCES (2018) data, ATHS serves 1,520 students. The school demographic reporting of race indicated that the population is 56% white, 35% black, and 7% Hispanic with 36% of students receiving free and reduced lunch.

Two-hundred and twelve students are currently enrolled in choral classes. The choral curriculum includes five developmentally sequenced choral music classes: Adaptive Choir (mixed choir of typical students and students with disabilities, grades 9–12), Mixed Choir (beginners and advanced mixed, grades 10–12), Men's Choir (grades 9–12), Women's Choir (grades 9–12), Concert Choir (women's choir, grades 10–12), and AT Singers (advanced mixed, grades 10–12). Due to a conflict with my schedule and the scope of the study, the Adaptive Choir was not included in the present study. Most of the students at ATHS have their first formal experience with music instruction and singing in choir at the high school level.

Assessment practices in the choral program. This research site was a rich case in which to examine assessment practices and the perceptions of those practices. The choir teacher implemented various forms of assessment in her choral program. Those assessments included

participation and attendance-based assessments, a theory curriculum, and performance assessments. Performance assessments included solo and small group singing assessments that were performed live and recorded. Recently, she began to experiment with ways to assess student singing within the ensemble using the CASA strategy, an innovative assessment practice. Her use of the CASA strategy along with her implementation of other assessment strategies throughout the semester were examined throughout the course of this study.

Participants

Participants included the choral music teacher (Ms. Andrews) and twenty choir students.

Teacher. Ms. Andrews was the lead choral educator at the high school and had been teaching at the school for 13 years. She had developed a successful choral program built on what she described as a "foundation of musical skill and understanding." The choirs consistently received superior ratings at the state's choral performance assessment. The ATHS choral handbook described the course goals as follows: "The choral classes at ATHS are designed to cultivate the development of skills in vocal technique, sight-reading, vocabulary enrichment, and performance skills." Ms. Andrews wanted to develop choral singing skills in the students and teach them proper concert etiquette through an assortment of performance experiences and opportunities. In her role as the lead choral teacher she oversaw and administered all forms of academic assessment and grading procedures in the classroom.

Students. Students were selected to participate based on recommendations from Ms. Andrews and their ability to contribute, in a meaningful way, to the study. Student participation for this study represented a cross section of the larger school and choir population and provided perspectives from varying levels of experience in choral singing, vocal skills, and musical development. Recruitment scripts were read to recommended students to invite their

participation in the study. Consent forms were sent home and an email was sent to the parents of the recruited participants with a digital copy of the consent form (see Appendix B). Students were given an opportunity to field questions about the study. Students signed assent forms following the collection of their signed consent forms and prior to the first focus group discussion (see Appendix F).

A total of 20 students participated in this study, including ten beginner and ten advanced choir students. Student participants identified racially as black (6) or white (14), which reflected the demographic configuration of the choir population, and included 10 boys and 10 girls. The advanced choir students, mostly 11th and 12th graders, possessed more experience (three to four years) in choir at ATHS and greater familiarity with the assessment practices of the choral classroom. For beginning students (mostly 9th and 10th graders) this was their first or second year in a choir. Table 3.1 provides a list of the student participants, their grade level, the ensemble they sang in, their experience level, and their total years of choral experience.

Table 3.1

Student Participants

Name	Grade	Choir	Level	Years of Experience	Gender	Race
Brandi	9	Women	Beginner	0.5	Female	White
Alice	9	Women	Beginner	0.5	Female	Black
Miranda*	10	Women	Beginner	1.5	Female	White
Maria*	10	Concert	Beginner	1.5	Female	Black
Nina	10	Concert	Beginner	1.5	Female	White
Jake*	9	Men	Beginner	0.5	Male	White
Sidney	9	Men	Beginner	0.5	Male	Black
Lane	10	Mixed	Beginner	1.5	Male	White
Charlie*	10	Mixed	Beginner	1.5	Male	White
Jude	10	Men	Beginner	1.5	Male	Black
Jess	12	ATS&Mix	Advanced	3.5	Female	Black
Catherine*	12	ATS&Mix	Advanced	3.5	Female	Black
Liz*	11	ATS&Mix	Advanced	2.5	Female	White
Barbara	12	ATSingers	Advanced	3.5	Female	White
Becca	11	ATS&Mix	Advanced	1.5	Female	White
Tommy	12	ATSingers	Advanced	1.5	Male	White
Mark*	12	ATS&Mix	Advanced	3.5	Male	White
Joseph	12	ATS&Mix	Advanced	3.5	Male	White
Michael*	12	ATS&Mix	Advanced	3.5	Male	White
Bryant	11	ATS&Mix	Advanced	1.5	Male	White

Note. * denotes participants who completed an individual interview

Data Generation

Data generation occurred from October 2018 to March 2019. Data was generated from multiple sources and my role was as a participant observer. The participants identified and understood my role as the researcher (Stake, 1995). Primary data sources included field notes generated during observations of assessment practices in the classroom, focus group discussions, teacher reflections, and semi-structured interviews with the teacher and selected student participants. Collection of artifacts, including but not limited to the descriptions of the choir classes, student work and submissions, and student grades were also included in the data set.

Observations. Over the 6 months of the study, I formally observed a total of 27 hours of class time and took observational field notes (see Table 3.2). The purpose of the observational field notes was to (a) describe classroom assessment practices, (b) document student and teacher behaviors before, during, and after the use of assessment strategies, and to (c) identify and examine the participants' engagement and interactions with specific assessment strategies. During the observations, I also noted the types of assessments used and any feedback, verbal or nonverbal, provided to students by the teacher and also feedback provided by the students to the teacher. Because of my regular involvement with the choral program, I also conducted many hours of informal observations while I served as their collaborative pianist. Following each observation, I transformed my initial jottings from the field into research texts. These texts informed ongoing focus group discussions, interviews, and observations. Additionally, they informed the reflective prompts that were sent to the teacher.

Table 3.2

Observation Schedule

Week	Date	Class Observed	Time
1	October 4	Men's, Mixed, Concert, and Women's Choir	45 min. each/3 hours
2	October 16	Men's, Mixed, Concert, and Women's Choir	45 min. each/3 hours
3	October 23	Men's, Mixed, Concert, Women's Choir, and AT Singers	45 min. each/3.75 hours
5	November 29	Men's, Mixed, Concert, and Women's Choir	45 min. each/3 hours
6	December 4	Men's, Mixed, Concert, Women's Choir	45 min. each/3 hours
	December 6	Christmas Concert	1.5 hours
7	December 13	Men's, Mixed, Concert, and Women's Choir	45 min. each/3 hours
8	January 23	Men's, Mixed, Concert, and Women's Choir	45 min. each/3 hours
9	February 1	Men's, Mixed, Concert, Women's Choir, and Singers	45 min. each/3 hours
10	March 22	Men's, Mixed, Concert, Women's Choir, and Singers	45 min. each/3 hours
Totals	10 formal observation days	5 choir classes	27 hours of observation

Teacher data. Data generated with the teacher included five written reflections and two semi-structured interviews. The purpose of generating teacher data was to better understand her choices, values, and lived experience with assessment in her classroom; the 'how and why' dimension of implementing various assessment practices in the choral classroom.

Teacher interviews. Two semi-structured (Roulston, 2010), individual interviews were conducted with the teacher (see Appendix E for teacher interview protocols). Both interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the teacher and took place at a location chosen by the teacher. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Both interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for the data set. Ms. Andrews was provided an opportunity to review and request changes to the interview transcripts.

The first interview took place at the beginning of the semester, in October. The purpose of this interview as to investigate the teacher's background, biographical information, attitudes and values towards assessment in choir, and the external and internal influences that potentially shaped those values. The second interview used preliminary observational data, the teacher's reflections, assessment artifacts, and my field notes to discuss specific assessment practices and events that occurred during data collection.

Teacher reflections. The teacher was prompted to generate reflections as she worked through the planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection stages of the assessment cycle. Five teacher reflections were generated throughout the course of the study. The reflections described the teacher's thought processes about assessment, including how assessment informed instruction and her interactions with the students throughout the various assessment procedures. In addition to the reflections, the teacher also responded, via email, to specific prompts concerning assessment practices as they emerged during observations or interactions with the teacher and students.

Student data. Data generated from the students included the content of focus group discussions, individual interviews, and artifacts of student work.

Focus groups. Focus group discussions were designed to generate conversations with student participants and to elicit thoughtful engagement with topics about assessment in the choral classroom (see Appendix F for a focus group discussion protocol). Focus groups were organized so that participants could share and reflect on their collective and individual experience of the assessment practices occurring in their choir class with peers of similar skill and experience levels. Focus groups were organized as follows: (a) five beginner female students (b) five beginner male students, and (c) ten (five male and five female) advanced students.

The focus group discussions took place at the beginning of data generation and focused on the participants' attitudes, values, and understanding of the assessment and grading practices in choir along with their perceptions of assessment in general. I explored the participants' experiences with both the conventional and innovative assessment strategies that were commonly used in this particular choir classroom. Emerging topics and themes from focus group discussions informed subsequent individual interviews.

Individual interviews. Four beginning students (two males and two females) and four advanced students (two males and two females) were identified to participate in individual interviews as a result of teacher recommendations and my engagement with the students throughout focus group discussions and observations. These students participated in one semi-structured individual interview following their experience with the various forms of assessment used in choir (Roulston, 2010). Student artifacts such as their singing self-assessment and my field notes were used to guide the students to reflect upon their lived experience with different assessment practices. Prompts and questions were designed to illicit meaningful reflection of the perceived impact that the assessment strategies had on individual and ensemble achievement. The timeframe for interviews and focus group discussions is outlined in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Interview Schedule

Date	Interview	Participant(s)	Time
October 20	Teacher #1	Ms. Andrews	45 minutes
November 6	Focus group #1: Advanced students	Jess, Catherine, Liz, Barbara, Becca, Tommy, Mark, Joseph, Michael, Bryant	40 minutes
December 12	Focus group #2: Beginning women	Brandi, Alice, Miranda, Maria, Nina	40 minutes
December 12	Focus group #3: Beginning men	Jake, Sidney, Lane, Charlie	30 minutes
January 14	Individual student	Michael	40 minutes
January 14	Individual student	Mark	40 minutes
January 28	Individual student	Jake	30 minutes
January 28	Individual student	Noah	30 minutes
February 11	Individual student	Miranda	30 minutes
February 11	Individual student	Maria	30 minutes
February 11	Individual student	Liz	30 minutes
February 11	Individual student	Catherine	30 minutes
February 18	Teacher #2	Ms. Andrews	30 minutes
Totals	13 interviews	20 participants	7.5 hours

Artifacts. Artifacts collected included recorded singing assessment submissions, student self-assessments, teacher feedback rubrics, concert sign-in sheets, written theory tests, student handbooks, student grade reports, and other documents collected for the purpose of the assessment strategies. These items were used to support and reinforce themes that emerged from

the other data sources. Data collected from these artifacts was also used to inform focus group discussions, individual interviews, and prompts for teacher reflections.

I was granted access to student choir class records and parent information through an online course management/grade book program. I was granted permission to access these records from the school system and from participants individually through consent forms. This course and grading information was analyzed to understand how the music teacher classified and weighed course assessments, along with the types of assessments used and the frequency of those assessments. The ATHS choir handbook was examined to determine the grading and assessment policies and procedures as communicated to both students and parents at the beginning of the school year. These artifacts, when combined with the observational and interview data, facilitated triangulation of a rich data set and contributed to the trustworthiness of the findings.

Data Analysis

Stake (1995) defined data analysis as a "matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p. 71). Data analysis, in this sense, was the interpretation and deconstruction of not only the data in research texts, but also the interpretation of the meaning of my impressions. Both during and after data collection, I employed categorical aggregation to deconstruct and organize complex data into categories as I searched for meanings, patterns, and relationships that supported behaviors, issues, and the contexts unique to this particular case (Stake, 1995).

I transcribed observational field notes and teacher reflections into research texts throughout the data collection period. I recorded and transcribed all focus group discussions and interviews. Transcriptions were completed before subsequent interviews and groups were

scheduled in order to use the data to inform and guide the direction of future protocols. After transcribing focus group discussions and interviews, the teacher and students were given the transcripts for member checks.

At the conclusion of my fieldwork, I used Maxwell's (2013) strategies for qualitative data analysis as a guide. Maxwell suggested the following strategies: (a) reading and memoing, (b) categorizing strategies (coding and thematic analysis), and (c) connecting strategies (narrative analysis) (p. 105).

Memos. Maxwell (2013) proposed that the first step of qualitative data analysis was reading the interview transcripts, field notes, and artifacts. It was through these initial readings that memos were generated about what I heard and experienced. These memos were either typed using *Notes* on a MacBook or handwritten in a journal. Handwritten memos were also converted into research texts following engagement with the data. Memos helped to develop preliminary ideas about categories and emerging themes and also informed subsequent focus group discussions and interviews.

Categorizing strategies. Maxwell (2013) suggested that the purpose of coding is to deconstruct the data and rearrange them into categories that support and inform comparisons of categories and the development of themes and issues. Transcriptions and research texts were initially coded using first cycle coding methods (open coding), which allowed me to translate and interpret data (Saldaña, 2015). These texts and the impressions that emerged through first cycle coding were integral to the interactive process of data collection and guided subsequent interviews, teacher prompts, and focus group discussions while refining the focus of the observations over time. Transcriptions then underwent second cycle coding to organize similarly

coded data into categories based on their common attributes, what Stake (1995) defines as categorical aggregation.

The final step in the second cycle coding process was to transform categorical data into themes (thematic coding), which provided a summary of data that informed discussions and predicted patterns that could potentially emerge in future studies (Saldaña, 2015). Substantive and thematic categories placed the coded data into a more general framework and represented the researcher's concepts and understanding of the data (Maxwell, 2013).

Connecting strategies. Connecting strategies served to address the deficiency that may be a result of the limitations of coding and categorizing (Maxwell, 2013). In this concluding step of data analysis, connections between the various categories and themes were identified and explored using the context in which they occurred as the lens for analysis. Interpretations and conclusions were drawn from linking patterns and reconstructing the deconstructed data to form relevant meanings and findings (Stake, 1995).

Trustworthiness

Validation of data was achieved through triangulation, the gathering of rich data, prolonged engagement, and member checks (Stake, 1995). The use of multiple data sources (triangulation), included observational field notes, teacher reflections, artifacts, and group and individual interviews. My prolonged engagement in the field enabled the gathering of rich data, therefore, strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings (Stake, 1995). Through this "methodological triangulation," I sought to present an extensive body of descriptions from multiple points of view that supported my interpretations (Stake, 1995, p. 114).

Member checks, considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility," allowed the participants to evaluate the accuracy and

credibility of the data (p. 314). Through the process of member checking, participants examined rough drafts of interview transcriptions and were asked to review the material for accuracy and agreeability (Stake, 1995). Ms. Andrews also read and approved the findings of the study.

Limitations

This study described assessment practices in a choral music program in a Southeastern state that is home to a large state university. Practices may vary in other locations in the U.S. The reported findings and discussion are limited to the perspectives and experiences of the participants and the participant-researcher.

Choral students and the choral teacher were the only participants in the study. This sampling decision excluded parents and administrators who, based on previous research, have been reported to impact and influence assessment decisions in the music classroom (McClung, 1996). References were made to administrators' and parents' values and beliefs throughout the study, but those findings were reported as they were perceived by the students and Ms. Andrews. This study and future studies would benefit from including parent and administrator participants and their perspectives.

While the findings from this study may not be transferable to other cases, the in-depth examination of the assessment experiences of the students in the choral classroom context, and the teacher's beliefs and practices, provided valuable insights into the complexity of assessment in the choral music classroom.

Clarifying Researcher Subjectivity

The motivation for my interest in assessment grew out of my experiences as a choral music educator, a music teacher educator, and my personal experiences with the challenges in assessing learning in large ensembles. My relationship to the site of this case study was complex.

The choral teacher was a colleague and friend and I worked at ATHS part-time. While there were benefits to my familiarity with this setting, such as trust and rapport with the students and teacher, that familiarly had the potential to create power or boundary issues that could impact my study. Because the students were aware of my friendship with the teacher, the possibility existed that they could be reluctant to be open and honest with their reflections and explanations of their feelings and experiences, especially those experiences that may involve her or her decisions. The in-depth nature of the study also had the potential to create tension if findings were viewed as a reflection of my personal feelings towards participants as individuals.

In an effort to address the potential power issues that were possible in my new role as a researcher, as opposed to my typical role of teacher/instructor, I was deliberate and intentional about how I defined my role as the researcher, especially with the students. I was sure to clarify the purposes of the study and to reinforce the confidentiality of each participants' contribution. Both the student participants and Ms. Andrews appeared comfortable and eager to talk with me about assessment. I used member checks to ensure that participants approved of and supported the telling of their story. Therefore, I am confident that the familiarity between myself and this case ultimately proved to benefit the depth and authenticity of the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The data analysis presented in this chapter conceptualizes both student and teacher perspectives to discuss their understandings of and experiences with various forms of assessment, and to describe emerging themes that are relevant to both the broader topic of assessment and to the research questions explored in the present study. Rich descriptions and narrative illuminated aspects of the students' and the teacher's lived experiences with the various assessment practices in the choral classroom.

Themes emerging from data analysis included the following: assessment for ensemble achievement, individually assessing participation and attendance, individually assessing musical knowledge and skill, assessment and the choir's role in the school curriculum, and factors and challenges that impacted assessment in choir. External and internal influences at ATHS, including the perceptions of the learning outcomes and nature of the choral music experience, interacted to impact the assessment decisions and practices that were implemented in this case.

Assessment for Ensemble Achievement

The purpose of assessment in the choir program at TCHS was closely tied to how students and their teacher defined what it meant to sing in a school choir. The concept of team, collaboration, and a focus on interactive learning was strongly woven into the fabric of the choral culture at ATHS. The students' views and beliefs about assessment reflected those values. Student participants often discussed assessment and learning within the context of ensemble achievement. Although the teacher had individual learning goals for students, the goal of

ensemble achievement reflected the essence of what it means to sing in a choral ensemble and therefore, served as the primary goal.

Ensemble achievement as individual achievement. A central finding of this study was that students understood individual achievement in choir as inextricably linked to ensemble achievement and in some ways secondary to ensemble achievement. The ensemble's success and ability to work towards a common goal was of a higher priority than individual assessment:

> When it all comes together, it just is awesome. If you don't grow as an individual with your understanding of music and your knowledge of the particular piece, then you're not going to contribute anything to the ensemble, and then the ensemble is not gonna grow as much. So, it's kind of building blocks, one has to have them before the other one. Both [individual achievement and ensemble achievement] are yes, very important. The end goal is going to be ensemble growth, but the short-term goal is gonna be personal growth. (Liz)

This student, like others, understood her individual achievement in choir as directly related to the ensemble achievement. She explained individual achievement as short term goals that were in service to the end goal, which was ensemble growth. Students were motivated to excel as individuals so that they could be valuable members of the team (ensemble). Being a part of something bigger than themselves was a key component of their learning experience that influenced their perceptions of assessment and their individual achievement in choir.

Ms. Andrews' individual learning goals for students were designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills to be able to contribute to the ensemble in a meaningful way. Student learning goals were delineated in the course syllabus, which was given to students and explained

at the beginning of the school year and signed by parents. Ms. Andrews had different expectations and goals for different levels of ensembles in the program, with the overarching goal of ensemble achievement and understanding the essence of singing in a choir:

> [In] the beginning level class I want them to learn how to read basic rhythms and then pitches together with basic rhythms. I want them to learn some techniques for using their voice correctly. I want them to– like I said, learn what it means to be in a choir and start to understand the goal of singing together. . .For the advanced choirs we are still obviously working on reading and literacy. They are still, there's just still some education. You give them a piece in Latin, and they are like, "What is this?" They just don't know what choir [is], what is choir music, and what does it mean to be in choir.

Daily assessment in rehearsal. The most common assessment practice observed at ATHS occurred throughout the rehearsal process and was the teacher's rehearsal techniques used to diagnose, evaluate, and correct the sound of the ensemble. This was the most beneficial assessment practice for realizing the primary goal of ensemble achievement. She indicated: "So, the most useful thing for me is just the assessment that I do inside my brain when the kids all sing together that I never write down anywhere or give anyone a grade for." This assessment practice, while not documented or graded, was believed to be significant by both Ms. Andrews and the students for supporting ensemble achievement. Students, like Charlie, perceived that the feedback provided through this informal assessment practice was accurate and that the sound was indicative of their level of ensemble achievement. He stated: "Just by listening to how we sound she knows what we sound like when we are all actually trying and then some days where we just don't."

These sound assessment and feedback exchanges were observed many times at ATHS. The feedback and information obtained from this assessment practice was valuable to the teacher for gauging ensemble progress and the direction and planning for subsequent classes. Ms. Andrews reinforced the frequency and value of this type of assessment and feedback by stating: "That's just like all day. That's everything I do, to me. Feedback in the rehearsal."

Individual Assessment of Participation and Attendance

Ensemble achievement, as the primary goal, required students to develop a fundamental understanding of and to demonstrate mastery of the proper rehearsal and performance behaviors and skills. These behaviors and skills were necessary to cultivate a learning environment that was conducive to the type of interactive learning and performance that is choral music education. Therefore, participation and attendance were assessment practices that were deemed necessary and important to fostering a productive learning environment and were believed to reinforce high levels of ensemble achievement.

Assessing participation. According to the grading policy listed in the course syllabus: "Grades in the choral department are largely based on participation." In order to receive full credit for participation in a choir class at ATHS, a student was expected to (a) actively participate in class each day, (b) remain quiet when not singing, and (c) have only required materials at seat (ATHS syllabi). Students received 50 points per week for participation and points were deducted from that total score when students failed to meet the expectations communicated in the syllabus.

Ms. Andrews and the other adult instructors present during class observed and documented deductions on the participation log. Students were permitted to see the log when and if they had questions about their participation grade. Otherwise, summative, weekly participation

grades were posted and reported to students and parents through an online data collection and reporting platform used at ATHS to track attendance, record and report grades, and communicate with parents.

Teacher perception of participation grades. Ms. Andrews regarded the participation assessment as useful and important, but she acknowledged the issues that were potentially associated with this practice by stating: "There's no way I can monitor each and every child's participation fairly." She attempted to be transparent and open about the participation grades and to address subjectivity by keeping a daily participation log. The log included documentation of observable behaviors, such as failure to participate, improper posture, phone or other materials out, failure to properly use sheet music, and not marking music when instructed. Furthermore, she was candid about the difficulty in accurately assessing each student's individual daily participation:

> Who's to know if they just start singing the minute that I walk by and then they stop. Of course, you can't know. You can look at facial expression. You can look at is their mouth open or closed. But no, you can't really know their level of participation from the conductor's podium.

Her response reinforced the complexities of evaluating participation in a large group setting. Like many other music educators, Ms. Andrews used a combination of "subjective impressions and objective documentation" to assess daily participation and engagement (Russell & Austin, 2011, p. 44).

In the beginning level choirs, participation assessment was used to reinforce rehearsal etiquette, to promote desirable behaviors, and to discourage undesirable behaviors. Because many of the students participating in the beginning level choirs had no previous experience

singing in a choir, Ms. Andrews used the participation assessment as a way to evaluate their understanding of her expectations for their behavior and engagement in the rehearsal process. She described the criteria for beginning choirs:

> Participation would be learning how to rehearse, how to look at your music and try to make a connection with what you hear and what you see, posture, please don't chew gum in rehearsal, those kinds of things.

Class attendance was also factored into daily participation grades, emphasizing the value that Ms. Andrews placed on students being present for rehearsal and the importance of the learning that took place during class time. This policy regarding attendance and grading also reflected the significance of each individual's contribution to the ensemble sound and the process of achieving as a group.

Because student engagement and attendance were essential to the achievement of the ensemble, participation and attendance were heavily weighted assessments. Participation and concert attendance accounted for 68% of the students' second nine-weeks grade, with weekly participation carrying the most weight. The weight and frequency of participation assessments suggested that participation was highly valued by Ms. Andrews.

Student perceptions of participation grades. Participation came up frequently in the focus group discussions. When students were asked how they received a grade in choir all three groups responded with participation first. We discussed the ways in which Ms. Andrews assessed their participation. Students stated that she observed their engagement to determine if they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, identified students who were not meeting those expectations, and documented their infractions.

Students' understanding of the expectations and criteria for participation varied. While looking at a grade report for the second nine weeks, which included grades for weekly participation, Christmas concert attendance, and theory, I asked individual students to discuss their participation grade with me. Responses varied, but they perceived the following criteria as necessary to receiving a satisfactory participation grade: coming to class each day, singing, looking at your music, not being on your phones, being engaged, and contributing to the sound of the choir. Maria, a beginning student in Concert Choir, explained her participation grade to me in this way:

> The 50 [grade] in choir means you come to class; you participate. You're not just sitting in your chair, talking to your friends, disturbing them from learning the music that they need to learn because you also need to learn it, too. You had to participate in class, be on time, you had to show up. You had to act like you're into it, instead of just sitting there like: "Oh, this is boring and I'm ready to go home." And I sang when we were supposed to, and I put effort into the class. I didn't just sit there and slouch back in my chair, barely open my mouth when I sang.

Maria described what she believed to be the desirable and undesirable behaviors that were required to meet the participation expectations for engagement in the rehearsal process. She understood that being "into it" was evaluated through observable behaviors and skills such as posture, focus, singing, and being responsive to the teacher.

In a beginning level class, such as men's choir, participation tended to be defined by students as whether or not students demonstrated good choices, "acted right, and didn't goof off" (Jake). In other words, the participation grade reflected the students' behavior. Conversely, because participation in advanced choirs at ATHS required a developed understanding of

rehearsal etiquette and appropriate behavior, advanced students viewed participation as being related to their individual engagement with and response to the musical expectations set by Ms. Andrews and the rehearsal process, and less about policing behavior. Catherine, an advanced choral student, described her participation grade as including musical outcomes, including addressing or fixing musical mistakes noted by the teacher:

> That means that I put forth effort to do whatever we're doing in that week. I put forth effort to achieve. When she says, "Fix something." Fix it, not keep messing up that same thing that she said fix and just doing what she says to do when she says to.

For the students, the participation assessment practice was a necessary and useful component of the choral experience because it reinforced and supported the structure and dynamic of the classroom that was essential for cultivating ensemble identity and ensemble achievement. Therefore, the evaluative process that resulted in the participation grade was not perceived to be unfair or inequitable by students.

Assessing concert attendance. According to the class syllabi, ATHS students received deductions from their concert attendance grade for unexcused absences from concerts, tardiness to the performance, incorrect uniform, and improper concert etiquette (behavior). Students who did not attend required performances were at risk for receiving a failing final grade. Students who were excused from a performance were expected to report to the teacher to schedule make-up work, which included written work or an aural exam. Performance attire expectations and all concert dates were communicated in course syllabi that were distributed to the students on the first day of class. Reminders about concert dates and information were also sent home through email and text messages to parents and students throughout the semester. For each required performance, Ms. Andrews assigned parent volunteers to document student attendance and to

evaluate their concert attire. This documentation was evaluated to determine the concert grade and was available to the students upon request.

Teacher perceptions of concert attendance grades. Ms. Andrews graded concert attendance in order to motivate students to attend performances. By assigning a grade for concert attendance, she reinforced the practical and tangible aspects of presenting a musical performance that requires each member of the ensemble to be present. The performance demonstrated the learning and achievement of the ensemble and of the choir as a class publicly. Therefore, the grade reflected the significant value of the performance as part of the choral class experience.

Students not having adequate transportation to a concert or unexpected events (such as the traffic accident that blocked traffic on the way to the Christmas concert venue) effecting a student's attendance for a concert are issues that could have potentially compromised a student's concert grade. Ms. Andrews did not recall any such instances, but she did tell me that if there were issues she likely wouldn't know about them because the students would be afraid to tell her. Students never once indicated any sort of fear or trepidation in communicating with Ms. Andrews, but perhaps the high-stakes context surrounding concerts and the value that the performances held for both Ms. Andrews and the students motivated them to solve any problems or obstacles they faced in attending performances.

The extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for concert attendance, including the concert attendance assessment (grade), were such that at this point in her career Ms. Andrews rarely had issues with students not attending performances. It was also evident that this assessment practice accurately assessed what Ms. Andrew's intended it to assess: punctuality, attendance, and appropriate concert attire.

Student perceptions of concert attendance grades. Students clearly understood the expectations for concert attendance and concert attire. When it came to wearing the right concert attire there were not only implications for their concert grade, but participants reported instances where students not wearing the appropriate clothes weren't allowed to perform. Concerts and performances were a natural outcome and goal of the choral music experience at ATHS and therefore, students were motivated intrinsically (being a valuable ensemble member) and extrinsically (grade) to attend. A student summed up the role of the concert expectation:

> It says that you are willing to put yourself forward and come and be in the choir, instead of just sitting at home. When you know you're in choir, you have a concert. So, you have to push yourself, be like, "Oh, wait. I have a concert tonight." You just can't stay at home. You have to go to your concert, 'cause that is a huge grade. (Maria)

While most students agreed that evaluating punctuality and concert attire were the principle goals of the concert assessment practice, some students perceived that their concert grade reflected their musical participation or vocal effort during the performance. Miranda noted: "Like, you're acting like you're involved, and you should sing like you're happy to be there, and willing to be there, and that stuff." Another student emphasized the actual vocal performance in his understanding of the concert attendance grade: "That's giving you feedback on how well you performed, what you could do next time to improve" (Jake). Another student noted performance criteria in addition to basics like wearing the right uniform:

> Well, whenever you walk in you sign in and you show that you're wearing your entire uniform. So that's at least 100 [points] right there. And then to the best of your ability. If you're on stage, if you're engaged watching her conduct. 'Cause if you're just standing

there doing nothing, she's gonna see you. We're choir kids, we pop around and jump. We move with the music. And if you're doing nothing, she can see that. (Mark)

For the students, concert attendance held similar value to that of a final exam. Concerts represented the culmination of their daily work and achievement as individuals and as an ensemble. Daily participation and engagement supported learning throughout the rehearsal process that resulted in a prepared concert performance that the students were proud of:

> We work for months and months, so the performance, the concert, that's like the most important thing to go to. That, that's what should be graded the highest. We work the hardest and the longest on. We spend the most time on it. (Lane)

Conclusion. At ATHS, assigning grades to participation and concerts motivated students to fulfill their required curricular commitments that occurred both during and outside of the school day. Thus, the teacher's assessment practices and choices, her preferred method of instruction, and student values of participation and attendance assessment supported the notion that the primary goal at ATHS was ensemble growth and achievement.

Individual Assessment of Musical Knowledge and Skill

Individualized assessment practices measuring content knowledge and skill are often compulsory and implemented in most required, nonelective courses and content areas but can be less common in performance ensemble classrooms. Ms. Andrews engaged in several individualized assessment practices focusing on theoretical musical knowledge and singing skill. While these individualized assessment practices measured and reported individual student achievement, they also supported and impacted ensemble achievement by holding individuals accountable for their own music making and musical knowledge. The choir program at ATHS used a music theory program (*TheoryGO*) and performance assessments that consisted of both

live and recorded solo and small group assessments, and the Contextual Authentic Singing Assessment (CASA) to individually assess students.

Theory curriculum. *TheoryGO* was a sequential and comprehensive curriculum for teaching music theory in performance ensemble classrooms that was developed by a choral music educator. *TheoryGO* was a standards-based assessment model that utilized differentiated and peer instruction to teach music theory concepts. Students began this theory program upon enrollment in a choral class at ATHS. Beginning students were taught basic music theory concepts as a group but a few weeks into the semester they began to move through the theory assessments at a self-determined pace by using study guides to learn new concepts. Ms. Andrews designated theory days where students were given an opportunity to study theory. During this time, more advanced students helped to instruct students at lower theory levels along with the teacher.

This program accommodated students with various ability levels because students did not move through the curriculum as a class but instead as individuals. Students who needed more time on a concept took the time they needed to master it before they moved on to a new one. Students who were ready could move on without waiting for students at lower levels of the program. Some of the later levels of the program included college-level theory concepts.

Teacher perceptions of the theory curriculum. Ms. Andrews described the theory program:

> The theory program was developed so that students who are returning members of an ensemble don't have to start back at the beginning with the beginner information at the beginning of every year. So, the program is structured so that you have to pass the first

level before you can move onto the information in the second level, and so on, and so forth. There are about 40 levels.

Theory exams were graded and factored into the students' overall grade in choir. The number of theory exams for each grading period varied. For the grading period that occurred during data collection, theory scores constituted 30% of the student's overall choir grade. The grade motivated many of the students to continue to progress through the theory program. Ms. Andrews believed students saw the theory assessments as more academic because they were written, formal assessments that generated an individual grade. Students were also motivated to progress through the theory levels in order to be considered for promotion to a higher-level choir:

> What motivates them to keep going is that they start to understand if I want to be in the next level group, I have to show some progress on my theory. When we've just finished a big concert, and they see, 'Oh, I want to be in that higher-level group.' (Ms. Andrews)

The differentiated approach was not without challenges. As students entered higher theory levels, they required more individualized instruction, which was sometimes difficult to accommodate. Additionally, Ms. Andrews felt the students compartmentalized the theory knowledge as unconnected to their choral music. She hoped to find additional ways to integrate and reinforce theory knowledge and concepts into the rehearsal process:

> I don't want to compartmentalize it, but I do sometimes. I was just thinking yesterday; I have to do a better job of referencing these things that they're learning when we're talking about theory inside of our rehearsal and making sure that they understand that those things cross over into the stuff that we're doing. That's hard to do just because we're not doing those things together at the same time. We have theory time and then we

rehearse, which I know is not the best, but how else? I don't know how else to do it at this point.

TheoryGO provided concrete student achievement data that Ms. Andrews used to report student learning to administrators and parents. This formal, objective assessment practice distinguished *TheoryGO* from the other strategies that were used to assess students in choir at ATHS.

Student perceptions of the theory curriculum. Students saw the theory grade as consequential, impacting their achievement in choir, and as a qualitatively different component of their choral music class and more akin to assessment in other high school classes:

> Well the motivation, with theory, for me considering I'm not a music major, I'm not gonna be in music education, the motivation is less like, "Ooh, this is exciting," and more like, "All right, for the grade and for being able to pass and do well in the class." That's kind of bad, but that's how it is with other classes. That's how I am with a math test. I understand why it's necessary, but it's not necessarily the fun part of it. (Michael)

Students knew that there was an expectation for a certain level of theory knowledge to be able to advance to upper level choirs. This motivated students to progress through the levels more rapidly. While this expectation wasn't formal policy, students, such as Barbara and Catherine, understood that their theory achievement impacted their placement into choirs:

> To get in mixed choir, you have to be at a certain level of theory (Barbara)
>
> For me, it was getting into the choir that I wanted to get into knowing that I had to get at a certain level. (Catherine)

Students valued the self-paced design of the theory program, which was a different approach to learning content from their required courses in school and from other whole-group theory lessons in other choir classes:

> I'm very, very, very glad that Ms. Andrews lets us work at our own pace, because I remember back in my middle school, we had . . . I specifically remember a couple days where we would sit down and our teacher would teach us theory, but it was all review for me because I've done music for so long. And it was like, this is the first line of the treble clef, this is the first space of the treble clef. And I was like, I know this all. But then when I get here Ms. Andrews is like, you can work at your own pace. I was like, oh man, I was so excited. So, it's good because some people are able to work slower, and some people are able to work faster and get the theory knowledge that they want. (Liz)

Students appreciated the specific feedback they received on each theory exam. Despite Ms. Andrew's concerns that theory was compartmentalized in her curriculum, students were able to articulate specific knowledge and understanding gained through *TheoryGO* that transferred into their ensemble singing. Dynamics, key signatures, note names, rhythmic values, and tonal center were some of the musical concepts learned through the theory program that students were able to talk about. To these students, this knowledge enhanced and supported their ability to understand and accurately perform their choir music. One student reflected upon how her learning from the theory program connected to her music making:

> Now that I know some about theory I can be like, oh this is this key signature, which is kind of cool. I just think that's cool. That's just me being a choir nerd. Then other times I can be like, oh this marking right here means attack it and release, and then this dynamic marking means forzando, so loud, quiet, loud. So, it's cool. I can put more into the music

than other people might be able to because I have a better understanding of what is written into the paper. (Liz)

Liz's statement reinforced the effects that the theory curriculum had on the students' individual musical knowledge but also how that knowledge, mastered through the self-paced, sequential, and comprehensive theory program, impacted their ability to contribute to the ensemble in a more meaningful way.

Performance assessments. Performance assessments in choir at ATHS included various types of singing assessments. These assessments were almost entirely focused on evaluating individual performances of the ensemble literature. One exception was that students in AT Singers were required to learn and perform two solo selections for solo and ensemble festival. Otherwise, the music used for performance assessments was music that was being rehearsed by the ensemble in preparation for performance.

Solo and small group singing assessments. Ms. Andrews implemented several forms of solo and small group (one singer per part) singing assessments at ATHS. During a rehearsal with the Concert Choir, I observed a live singing assessment:

Concert Choir sang in four parts (SSAA). Each section formed a line in the classroom with Ms. Andrews positioned at the head of the lines. When Ms. Andrews instructed the students to line-up, it was clear that they knew what was about to happen. Their reactions varied, with some students exhibiting anxiousness and other students appearing to be excited and eager to be in the front of the line. Students that worked their way to the back of the line, as to avoid having to go first, were then made to go first. Students then sang an excerpt of "In Dulce Jubilo," with the student at the head of each of the four lines singing together in a quartet. Ms. Andrews was in close proximity to the students and

> *moved to position herself in front of each of the four singers for several seconds so that she could hear them individually as they were singing. Little to no feedback was given except when Ms. Andrews had a quartet sing one line again because she couldn't hear the soprano 2 part. Students rotated from front to back so that everyone had a chance to perform with some students volunteering to perform more than once to balance out the quartets. Students were familiar with this process; it flowed smoothly and quickly.* (Observation, November 29)

Reflecting on this assessment practice, Ms. Andrews explained: "I don't ever give a grade for that, but I do it just to make sure the kids know the notes." The students often called these assessments pass-offs, which indicated their view of the assessment as a pass/fail approach designed to evaluate their knowledge of the music.

In the advanced choirs, students were also individually assessed through the use of live and recorded solo singing assessments. Sometimes students were spontaneously asked to stand and sing their part alone for the class. Other times solo assessments were recorded and submitted by every member of the ensemble to the teacher for grading and feedback. Students usually completed these assessments either at home or on their own time in a practice room, singing along to a recording of the accompaniment or to the other vocal parts if the piece was unaccompanied. Ms. Andrew's would spontaneously assign a solo, recorded singing assessment as a reaction to students, for example, not knowing the German text in one of their Christmas pieces ("Silent Night"). In that instance, the assessment proved useful in motivating students to complete an objective that had otherwise been neglected.

Contextual, authentic singing assessment (CASA). CASA was different from the more conventional forms of singing and performance assessments used at ATHS in that students

recorded themselves singing within the context of the ensemble, not away from the ensemble as demonstrated in the process for collecting the solo, recorded singing assessments. In this case, students used a personal device (like a cellphone) to generate an audio recording of themselves while singing and performing with their classmates as an ensemble during class rehearsal:

> *After 30 minutes of rehearsing, Ms. Andrews informed the Concert Choir that they would now record their "singing check." She instructed students to retrieve their personal device (cellphone) and if they didn't have one to come up and get an iPad from the cart. On this day, only three out of 35 students didn't have a device. While students were getting devices, she told others to go ahead and open the BRAVO app and prepare to record. She had recently begun to use the app for CASA submissions so there were quite a few questions about login information and other issues related to the app. She informed students that they would be singing the chorus of "Natural Woman" and that she was evaluating their recordings for note accuracy and stylistic considerations. She demonstrated how to hold the device properly, close to the mouth, when recording. Once everyone was ready, Ms. Andrews counted down "3,2,1, record" and then she counted them off and they sang the excerpt together, with the accompanist, while recording. After singing the excerpt she always reminded the students to press save. Immediately, students chatted about their reactions to the recording process with some students listening to their recordings right away. Ms. Andrews repeated this process 3 more times; more than usual because of the issues with the app. Some students recorded each round though others chose to use their first recording. All students were required to sing for each round of recording. She instructed students to pick the best recording to send to her.* (Observation, January 23)

CASA was always announced in advance so that students would know to have their personal recording device and to ensure that they had enough storage availability to be able to record. Students that did not have a personal device recorded on an iPad provided by the school. Most students in all classes had access to their own personal device.

The purpose of CASA was similar to other forms of singing assessment. That the recording was done in the choral context and students could hear other voices while recording offered unique benefits as Ms. Andrews explained:

> I have started to use [CASA] when I hear something individually that I don't hear in the group, but it's from a lot of people. Then I can go back and say, "Okay. The basses don't really know that measure. It sounds like they do because I'm hearing two or three sing the right notes, but the rest of them are off." I can go back and fix. That's what happened with the last one that they did. They didn't know [the measure]. I thought they knew it, but they didn't know it.

At the beginning of my data collection, students typically submitted their CASA recordings by emailing or texting them to Ms. Andrews, which she indicated to be an inefficient and daunting task of locating, downloading, and listening. Her response to this inefficiency was to exclusively use *BRAVO*, a cloud based organizational and management platform, to not only gather and organize the recordings but also to communicate feedback and grades to the students.

By the end of my observation period the students were still learning how to use, navigate, and operate the *BRAVO* app. Ms. Andrews spent instructional time helping individual students with passwords and submission issues. Even with the technological learning curve, she indicated that having most students submit their recordings to the same place allowed for her to easily navigate and efficiently evaluate their CASA submissions.

In addition to adjusting submission procedures, Ms. Andrews adjusted her evaluation and grading procedure for CASA throughout the course of this study. At the start of the study, beginning ensembles received pass/fail credit for submitting recordings and no additional or specific feedback was communicated to the students. Advanced students received general feedback and a grade. By the end of data collection, Ms. Andrews had created a rubric to use for evaluating CASAs for all ensembles that generated a grade and provided specific, individualized feedback.

Teacher perceptions of performance assessments. Ms. Andrews perceived CASAs to be beneficial to the students because they were receiving individualized feedback. She also believed that it was more beneficial than other forms of singing assessments because it evaluated their singing in a choral context. Ms. Andrews considered the CASA data to be a more accurate assessment of their individual contribution to the ensemble sound and performance: "That's what they really are doing. I mean, they're not singing a solo." Both Ms. Andrews and the students implied that students sing differently when singing alone than when they are singing with the choir. It was this concern about the validity of the solo singing assessments to accurately evaluate how the students perform when singing with their peers that motivated Ms. Andrews to implement the CASA.

Ms. Andrews spoke at length about the various reactions and experiences students had when recording and submitting their CASA assignments. As she increased the frequency and use of CASA, I observed that students felt more comfortable with the process and the idea of someone hearing them sing individually, but some students still exhibited anxiousness and concern. Ms. Andrews reflected:

> I think it's interesting because some kids who are very confident in knowing that they are doing the right thing are straightening up like: "Oh, I'm about to show her. I know how this goes." You can see it on their faces. They're really excited that they're getting the chance to show off on their recording. Then some kids are not as excited and they'll send me along, if they have to send it to me by text message, they will send me like, "This is terrible." Or, "This is the worst thing I've ever heard." Or, "Sorry this was not good."

Ms. Andrews believed that the students demonstrated more concern about her hearing them singing, individually, than they did with any of the written assessments that were administered at ATHS.

Both Ms. Andrew and I heard immediate impacts to the ensemble sound when students were recording their CASA. I noticed that when she was more specific in the criteria that she was going to evaluate (e.g., diction, dynamics, phrasing, etc.), the students attempted to address those particular areas in their performance and the process of recording resulted in instantaneous improvement. Ms. Andrews reflected upon a CASA process:

> I noticed that the ensemble sounded better. I think everyone was attempting to make their best sound, which they do not always do. I also heard some voices singing louder than normal. I think it's louder because they're all singing, trying to get it into the [device], so it records, but I think some things are better actually because they're thinking about them. They know that they have to, okay, I just said, "I'm listening for right notes, right rhythms, good tone, and good diction." Okay. They're thinking about those four things and trying to do them correctly.

CASA was an assessment practice that was inspired by the type of ensemble learning and performing to which the students were accustomed. Ms. Andrews was able to hear a student's

voice in relationship to the voices that were in close proximity them, which proved to be beneficial as she evaluated the recordings and used them to inform her instruction. Ms. Andrews felt the recordings were accurate representations of student voices and performances except when the quality of the student's device impacted the quality of the recording. The use of school iPads improved consistency in recording quality.

Ms. Andrews found CASA to be the most valuable assessment practice being implemented at ATHS for individually assessing students' understanding and achievement of the ensemble literature. It generated data that demonstrated and tracked musical growth and achievement in a way that was individualized and reflected the daily learning environment and context of the choral classroom. Throughout the data collection period, Ms. Andrews transitioned from using CASAs to generate individual feedback with no grade component to using this practice as a formal, formative assessment for which students received a grade.

Student perceptions of performance assessments. Performance assessments, in this case, were believed by students to be a necessary component of the music learning process and an assessment practice that was crucial for holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the ensemble. Students demonstrated varying levels of concern about the different forms of performance assessments, some of which included having to sing in front of their peers and/or Ms. Andrews. This finding was reinforced in the following exchange with Michael:

Researcher: What made it stressful?

Michael: Just if I didn't know it very well, and just the stress of singing in front of people. I don't like singing in front of everyone. Which I know, I definitely think for other people, it's probably more stressful than me. But a little bit last year, I remember like, oh gosh, when we got in the groups

of four. I liked it being the groups of four than just, 'Hey, sing this on your own,' cause it just makes the timing and everything go easier. So, when we lined up and had a soprano bass-

Researcher: Quartets?

Michael: Yeah, quartet I guess for that. We've definitely done a few quartets and we just line up in a line with the parts. I think that's probably a pretty fair way of judging it too, because you're getting each part but you're singing it on your own. So that's a pretty fair way of knowing. With that, if I knew it, I sang it right, and if I didn't, I didn't. If we'd done it this year, I think maybe once, and probably the latter half of last year, I felt pretty comfortable with it. And I don't mind just inherently, I don't mind singing in front of people. It's more of, if I don't know it, then it'll stress me out singing in front of people.

This exchange provided context for some of the students' nervousness triggered by the fear of singing in front of people that is required for some forms of performance assessment. Michael's statement also indicated the relief he experienced when asked to sing with a group, as opposed to singing alone, and the impact that hearing all of the parts had on the perceived fairness of the assessment. A similar concern was demonstrated for the recorded assessments but instead of being worried about singing in front of their peers, students were nervous about Ms. Andrews hearing their individual voice.

In regard to the other types of performance assessments, some students preferred the individual, solo recordings over the CASA submissions because they had more time to practice and rehearse their recordings before submitting them. They also appreciated the convenience and

flexibility of where they could complete the recording, either at home or in a school practice room.

A number of students, like Miranda, were aware that they sang differently when recording their solo assessments compared to the CASA recordings. She stated: “Because when I’m by myself, sometimes I’ll sing it differently, a little bit, then you would in a choir, because in a choir, you’re all supposed to fit the same sound that you’re looking for.” Another student commented that she could sing freely when recording a solo singing assessment.

Students had mixed reactions and communicated a variety of feelings about their experience with CASA. Some students were eager to record themselves while others were more reluctant. Their faces, physical affect, conversations between themselves, and the feedback directed towards Ms. Andrews communicated their either anxious or excited feelings about the assessment. Some students were vocal in communicating their apprehension about the recorded assessments by preempting the submissions through qualifying statements to Ms. Andrews that often negatively portrayed their expectations about the quality of their submission. I also observed the following during a day of CASA recordings:

> *Following each round of recording, I observed that most students immediately listened to themselves. Some students were intently listening to identify ways they could improve in the next round of recording. But, many students (especially in Men’s Choir) were laughing at themselves and then those that were laughing at themselves felt compelled to share their recording with their neighbor, so they could laugh too. The guys in Men’s Choir were eager to share their recordings with each other whereas the women in Women’s Choir were much more intentional about concealing their recordings so that others couldn’t listen. On this particular day, students in Women’s Choir experienced*

their first CASA recording session. Following Ms. Andrew's instructions for recording, one student immediately stated: "I'm going to let you know right now that I don't sound good." Following the recording, a different student in the same class told her peer sitting next to her: "Oh, I'm gonna send that to my Momma!" (Observation, Dec. 4)

These observations revealed differences in the way the students engaged with the CASA process ranging from insecurity to a feeling of accomplishment and a desire to share that accomplishment. Students knowing that the teacher would hear them sing alone, even though their peers weren't hearing them because they were singing with the choir, produced anxiety and concern in some but not all students.

Notably, the transition time between rehearsing and recording the next CASA was often spent practicing when in other transition periods during choir students would have opted to socialize. Students took the CASA process seriously. The individualized approach to assessment motivated them to be more intentional about their performance and contribution to the ensemble.

During the individual interviews with students I played their CASA recordings. Their responses were overwhelmingly negative. When prompted to discuss why they felt negatively about hearing their recording the students had difficulty articulating what they didn't like but they were certain that they didn't like listening to themselves sing. Even with the negative responses to their own recordings, students, such as Liz, felt that the teacher feedback was helpful for improvement and growth:

> Oh gosh, that sounds rough. Just my voice. But I mean, I've never really come across anybody who's like, oh I love listening to myself. I'm always trying to find a way that I can improve how I'm singing and what I'm singing and get better as a performer and a singer. Because this stuff is important to me, and so if I can find a way to be like, oh this

is what I need to work on, and then find a way to fix it, then I can progress and be better, which is nice.

Students also perceived that recording themselves within the context of the ensemble was helpful, easier than the solo recording, and that it improved their understanding of balance and blend:

> I feel like you can definitely hear me even with the other parts in the background, and that probably personally helped me, the other parts. 'Cause that's just how I'm used to singing something, but that still didn't necessarily come out perfectly. (Michael)

Liz noted:

> I feel like I sound a little bit better than that. It feels if because when you're singing with a group you can hear how your part blends in with all the other parts. And I feel like it's easier when I'm singing with the choir, because I don't have the melody there because the guys do, so I can hear how my part supports their part.

These statements supported Ms. Andrews concerns about the differences between choral singing and solo singing. The students agreed that the CASA was a more accurate representation of their authentic contribution to the ensemble because they were singing with the ensemble, which compelled them to sing differently than they would have if they were singing a solo.

Students valued CASA from an individual achievement perspective and they also thought it was valuable to Ms. Andrews:

> I think it helps, because you're singing into the phone and then sending it to Miss Andrews so she can individually assess you instead of doing it as a group where she hears everybody and not just one person. So, then she knows, hey, you need to come up on

pitch. You're too high, so you need to drop down or if you're right on. (Jake, Men's Choir)

Self-assessment using CASA. Towards the end of data collection, Ms. Andrews added a reflective component (self-assessment) to the CASA process. The students had been preparing for their yearly, state large-group performance assessment. In anticipation of that performance Ms. Andrews had students record and submit a CASA assignment for one of their performance assessment songs. Following the recording, she passed out the state performance assessment rubric and the students immediately used the rubric to complete a self-assessment of their recorded, CASA performance.

> *I observed the students as they engaged with and completed their self-assessment with the rubric. Some students listened to their recordings out loud while others chose to use their headphones. One student in particular came up to me and asked me to listen to their recording and told me how "awful" it was. I looked at her rubric and she had scored herself quite low on note accuracy and rhythmic accuracy but when I listened, she was in fact performing notes and rhythms correctly. I encouraged her and asked her if she knew that she was accurately performing notes and rhythms and once I focused her attention on evaluating her recording objectively, she was able to more accurately assess her performance.* (Observation, January 22)

This encounter suggested that students may have a hard time getting over hearing themselves to be able to objectively self-evaluate their achievement.

Student engagement with their CASA recording was more intentional and focused after using the state assessment rubric than in previous times without the self-evaluation component when laughter and silliness usually followed the CASA recording sessions. Once students were

accustomed to hearing themselves sing, the language and structure of the rubric facilitated a way for students to more accurately assess themselves and to support application and transfer of many of the ensemble concepts that Ms. Andrews reinforced daily. For the first time in the school year, CASA grades were included in the third nine-weeks grade report that went out shortly after data collection ended.

Conclusion. Performance assessments captured and gathered data that was used to evaluate students' individual understanding of musical skills and knowledge, as demonstrated through singing. Small group (quartet) assessments, solo assessments, and the CASA practice were adopted and implemented at ATHS to foster the individual growth of students and to support the growth of the ensemble. Although students rarely performed as individuals, individualized singing assessments were important to the students and to Ms. Andrews. The use of performance assessments at ATHS emphasized the importance of individual musical skills and reinforced the value of each individual's contribution to the achievement of the ensemble.

Assessment and Choir's Role in the School Curriculum

"Choir is different" was a sentiment communicated frequently by students when describing how choir fit into their school day and how it compared to their other classes. This distinction was integrated into most facets of their choral music experience. Choir's role in the school curriculum was influenced by the elective designation of choir. This designation also had an effect on the outcomes associated with learning in choir and the assessment of those outcomes. The participants' beliefs and values about the nature and the essence of the choral music experience, which were impacted by the choir's role in the school curriculum, were instrumental in understanding how assessment fundamentally worked in this choral program.

Choir as elective. Students at ATHS were required to take one fine arts credit for graduation. The school offered band, choir, art, and theatre as fine arts course options. Grades for those courses factored equally into their GPA as nonelective courses. However, choir's elective designation impacted the way students and others viewed learning and assessment.

Students described choir as somewhat extracurricular, even though it occurred during the school day. Liz explained: "You're expected to learn that [math], but you're not expected to take choir unless you want to, or you need a fine arts credit." Bryant noted: "Choir is extracurricular. And [parents are] like, 'That's what it's supposed to be — extra. It's not the main thing.'" Mark highlighted the fact that students paid a course fee for choir as another distinction from other classes: "Well, this is an elective. So, it's something you signed up for that you didn't have to and you're actually paying more money to do it."

Both the internal (student and teacher) and external (public, parent, and administrator) factors shaped participants beliefs about the purpose of choir in school and thusly, assessment in choir. Students cited various reasons for electing to participate in choir: they enjoyed singing, they liked the social benefits of being in choir, choir was fun, it was less stressful than other parts of their day, and they liked the teacher. These reasons were in contrast to their descriptions of their required courses and reinforced the differences between participation in choir and other classes.

Not only did students make an intentional decision or elect to be in choir, they also paid a fee to participate in the class. According to students like Mark, the fee distinguished and elevated the expectation for the participatory nature of the choral experience and differentiated choir from other classes throughout the school day; classes in which one student described learning as: "Being hunkered over a desk." Because the learning environment in choir was more interactive

and group-oriented than their required courses and even other electives, participants believed that the assessment practices should reflect those differences.

Choir as activity. Because the majority of the learning in choir occurred within a group setting and much of that learning was demonstrated through the psychomotor process of singing, participants believed choir to be more like an activity, such as athletics, and less academic in nature. Ms. Andrews stated:

> Everyone thinks that choir is not a real class...most teachers think "oh, you guys are just singing." Like, "All y'all are doing is singing." I would think that most parents think that. I think the general public thinks that we don't have a curriculum really and we just sing.

These perceptions troubled Ms. Andrews whose classes were structured to sequentially and developmentally provide instruction and learning opportunities appropriate for students with varying levels of musical skill and knowledge. Singing was perceived to be of less academic value or rigor than other types of acquired skills and knowledge.

The belief that choir was an activity and not an academic class influenced the way students viewed assessment in the choral classroom. This was evident in how students described the different ways they were assessed in required courses including homework, daily grades, and tests, and then compared those assessment practices to how they were assessed in choir. Most of the forms of assessment in required classes were traditional pen and paper assignments designed to measure and evaluate individual learning and achievement. One student, Mark, was surprised when I asked him if participation was assessed in his required courses like in choir: "Like a participation grade in other classes? It's just strictly academic so you don't get judged on whether you're paying attention or not or else you'd get zeros all the time. [Choir] is an elective."

Participation was considered by Mark to be an irrelevant form of assessment in required classes because his grades were determined by individual achievement on formal, mostly written, assignments. Individual participation did not impact the collective achievement of the required class, as it did in choir. Mark believed required courses were more strictly academic than choir and that participatory assessment practices were appropriate in choir because it was an elective.

Students were able to communicate specific skills and concepts (e.g., math objectives and history facts) that were assessed in their required classes and how those types of knowledge were conducive to more traditional forms of written assessment:

> In choir, while you do learn stuff it's not really something you can memorize and regurgitate back on a sheet of paper and turn that in for a letter grade. Because in math, you're told to memorize formulas, in history you're told to memorize dates and events and names, and you can return that onto a sheet of paper and say, yes the answer is A, or this is the answer to, fill in the blank. (Liz)

Students shared that the lack of formal, individual assessment in choir created a less stressful learning environment, when compared to their other classes:

> I feel like people don't have as much stress in choir as other classes, because with your other classes you have to study for all these big old tests, and you have to be doing your homework at home. If you're not getting something, you have to figure it out. But in choir, there's not that stress of, "Oh, well I have this test on this day," every week. (Maria)

The students' astute observations about assessment in their required courses versus choir demonstrated their understanding of the differences that reflected the goals and objectives of their courses. The focus in choir, and what they were assessed on in choir, was what the students

did. Therefore, the goal of assessment was not the objective, formal evaluation of that activity but rather whether or not the *doing* was demonstrated through participation, attendance, and performance.

Students, like Michael, saw their experience in choir as similar to other activities, such as sports, and less like their required, academic classes, such as math and history:

> You actually are going and talking about [choir]. Almost, how my brother would [about] a football game. It's like: "All right, we're learning this and this and I'm excited to sing this at this time." And then Josh will be like: "Yeah, and we did this in practice." But it's not like the grade of it all, even if there is a grade. (Michael)

The use and purpose of assessment in choir and how students discussed their engagement with and demonstration of learning in this context reinforced their view of choir as more of an activity than an academic class.

Parent influences. Based on the finding that participants viewed choir as different and that the adopted assessment practices reflected that difference, I was curious if the participants perceived that their parents and other stakeholders held similar beliefs about the choral learning experience and assessment. Students believed their parents' views of the choral learning experience were influenced by the same elective, nonacademic, attributes that shaped their own perceptions. The following exchange with two students reflected this mindset about grading in choir and their parents' involvement in monitoring their achievement in choir:

> Researcher: Then what do [parents] think about choir? Do you think they are getting on the computer to check your choir grade like they are getting on the computer to check your biology grade?
>
> All: No.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Jake: Because it's like something you enjoy doing and they know you'll succeed in it, I guess.

Charlie: Because It's an elective class and not a core.

Jake: They [parents] thought it was just participation and concert grades. They didn't think you'd have to take tests and stuff.

This interaction with a group of beginning male singers revealed that the elective nature of choir influenced their parents' views of the learning that took place in the choral classroom. Because choir was not a core class and the students appeared to enjoy the class, there was less concern from parents about the students' grade. Also, there was a general lack of understanding of how learning was assessed in choir by parents. Michael explained:

> People in choir, mostly, especially in mixed choir, a lot of people take advanced classes and stuff, so [Mom] would expect from every class, she would expect that to be an A. I just think if I didn't have an A in choir she'd be like: "What?" . . . I don't know if she knows how we're graded, but I just think she would expect that to be a good grade because it's just an elective.

According to students, parents differentiated between required classes and choir class in their expectations for levels of achievement. Most students indicated that their parents prioritized their performance in academic classes as more important than choir. Students also implied that participation in choir was a privilege given to those who were doing well in their required courses. Students reported that their parents made participation in choir contingent upon meeting their expectations in other courses. For example, Bryant shared: "My parents have told me straight to my face: 'You're doing academic homework first because choir's less important than

the academics.'" Liz explained that she was required to get good grades in order to be able to participate in extra choir activities: "My parents have said to me that if I don't get good grades in my academic courses then I can't go on to All-state or stuff like that."

Ms. Andrews commented that parents generally didn't inquire about assessment in choir. She stated: "Parents don't really, they've not said anything about grades. I mean they sort of just leave me alone." The students did not take issue with their parents' lack of focus on their choir grade and the difference in their expectations for choir versus other classes.

Administrator influences. Ms. Andrews was influenced by her administrators' (local and district level) expectations for assessment in choir and their general belief that choir was not academic. The school district had recently begun developing common classroom assessments for each subject area to be used across multiple schools. Ms. Andrews explained what happened when choral programs tried to participate in generating common assessments across the district:

> When our choral directors met together and asked to be given some money to buy a program for teaching theory so that we could get in on this common assessment thing, we were told, "No, you can't have that money." So, sorry (*chuckles*). I mean, that's sort of how we feel that we are not valued the same as other teachers. And I think it has a lot to do with our administration, especially district administration, not understanding us because we don't have a fine arts supervisor and we don't have anyone really at the central office level, who has any background in choral music or knowing what's going on.

The lack of financial support to participate in the district's common assessment initiative led Ms. Andrews (and other choral music teachers throughout the district) to feel undervalued. She felt that those in charge didn't hold the belief that learning in her classroom was equal in worth to

other courses. In an exchange she reinforced the lack of interest and expectations from administrators when it came to assessment in choir:

Ms. Andrews: The fact that from the top down, everyone wants us to keep records of everything and we need data. Everybody is talking about that. . . they are not talking to us because nobody expects us to do anything.

Researcher: Have they ever said that? Or is it just understood?

Ms. Andrews: I think it's just kind of understood.

Researcher: And there's never been a time where they've asked for [data]?

Ms. Andrews: No, there's never been a time where anybody has asked for it. But there actually has, you know, been times when I've gone to my principals and said: "This is what I'm doing, this is what you're asking from me, but I don't really have a way to give it to you." [They said:] "Oh, don't worry about it. It's ok. We just really want that from English, math, science, and social studies."

Teachers in required courses and other content areas were expected to generate individual data to document student learning and were given financial support and resources to facilitate data generation and assessment implementation. The lack of expectations, investment, and guidance for individualized assessment and data reporting for choir influenced Ms. Andrews beliefs and ultimately her decisions about assessment in choir.

Choir as an easy A. The phrase, easy A, was mentioned frequently in my discussions with students. Some of them held the belief that choir was in fact an easy class. They thought that many of their peers who weren't in choir considered choir to be an easy class. For some students, the easy reputation is what appealed to them and resulted in their decision to enroll in

choir. Perceptions of choir as being easy reinforced the nonacademic association of participating in choir.

Still, it was this very distinction and the differences between choir and their required courses that choir students took pride in. They enjoyed that choir was less stressful and that there were not as many tests or individualized assessments. In fact, the students expressed concern that implementing too many assessment practices might discourage students from participating in choir:

> The people that care, care. And the people that know it or can learn it, learn it. And the people that don't might not give as good of an effort. But then you also run the risk of the other way around, maybe everyone really gets into it because you make it very important, and then you run the risk of, does it make choir into a class where you're a little bit too grade-consumed? Takes some of the fun out of it. (Michael)

Most of the students agreed that the current assessment practices implemented in the choir at ATHS were appropriate to how their choral experience fit into their overall educational experience; however, Ms. Andrews rejected the notion that choir was an easy A:

> Really the only reason I don't like it is because I don't want people to come there to get an easy A that aren't truly interested in singing. To me, grades and the numbers that we attach to, "You made an A and you made a B." That's all just, to me, it's not that important. It's not as important as what you actually learn.

Ms. Andrews also noted the percentage of students in her classroom who were engaged in whatever process was taking place, providing insight into why participation played such a critical role in the assessment practices at ATHS.

> There aren't people who are sleeping. There aren't people who are like, you walk by another classroom and there's 50% of the class is not engaged. But in my room, most of the time, you got 95% of the class engaged. So that's 95% of the class that, to me, should get an A. I don't know. I don't like it, but I also think that the kids that are doing what they're supposed to do deserve to have an A.

When discussing choir grades, she often and notably used the term *get* instead of *earn*, emphasizing student engagement and the *doing* aspect of the learning process. Those students who were doing what they are supposed to be doing met Ms. Andrews expectations for achievement in choir and therefore, according to her, their grade reflected their engagement with the rehearsal process, despite the fact that this participation may or may not reflect their individual musical knowledge or skill.

Conclusion. The elective designation was a powerful and influential course categorization that impacted student, parent, and administrator expectations of assessment in the choral classroom. These beliefs along with the distinctive, nonacademic, participatory, and interactive learning attributes that were associated with choir, as discussed by both the students and Ms. Andrews, coalesced to create a unique learning environment that resulted in what participants perceived to be an appropriate and effective assessment model. These findings illuminated the tensions that existed between educational trends in assessment and data collection, specifically assessment initiatives at ATHS and throughout the district, and the choral program which was exempted/excluded from the standards of assessment that other disciplines were being held to.

Challenges Impacting Assessment in the Choral Classroom

Instructional time, large enrollment, performance expectations, assessment knowledge and training, and the efficiency of the current assessment practices were identified as challenges that impacted assessment at ATHS. Ms. Andrews attempted to try and reconcile the need for individualized assessment practices with the demands and challenges that existed in her classroom:

> I think that I'm not satisfied with the way that I'm currently assessing because I'm not able in the class time to do what I want to do and teach them all of the things that I have to teach them to catch them up from not having music from kindergarten to 8th grade... I can't do [individual assessment] every day because we don't have time. If we had every kid sing every song by themselves every day, we could not get through the literature that we're working on.

This statement, along with her understanding that the lack of individual assessment negatively affected the opinions of her colleagues and administrators, reinforced that while Ms. Andrews desired to individually assess students, the amount of time required to do that with some consistency was in conflict with the primary goal of using instructional time to rehearse and prepare music for performances.

Ms. Andrews reflected that another considerable challenge was the amount of time it took to evaluate the various singing assessments because of the overwhelming number of submissions due to the large classes that she teaches:

> It is difficult to try to listen to recordings for each of the 217 students in the choral department all at once. It takes hours and hours to do. I may need to rotate the recorded

> assessments, maybe do one class per week, so that I don't have to spend so much time grading all at once.

Both the students and Ms. Andrews identified that time combined with large enrollment was a significant deterrent for individually assessing students because more students means more time spent evaluating submissions and potentially more time away from the rehearsal process.

The efficiency and the utility of the current assessment practices, particularly the CASA was of concern to Ms. Andrews, and this challenge was compounded by limited instructional time and large enrollment. By creating a rubric for grading submissions, varying the frequency of the assessment, and also having the students do self-assessments, she began to explore strategies for making this practice more efficient. She plans to continue to experiment with various ways to gather and evaluate CASA submissions.

Like other music educators, Ms. Andrews expressed frustration with the lack of training and experience with individualized assessment practices appropriate for performance-based classes and specifically efficient strategies for assessing students individually. When asked about how much training she received in her pre-service and in-service professional development she stated:

> I would say not much. Maybe, a couple of days in our undergrad we spent talking about that, I think. But, not related to how to do it in a choral setting. More like the data assessment part of it. And then, we didn't talk about it [assessment] at all in my master's degree that I can remember. And professional development, one session, I think.

While she received some assessment instruction in her undergraduate program, the strategies and concepts discussed were not necessarily applicable to a choral context. She acknowledged that this deficit in her training influenced her early career choices and that she adopted assessment

practices that she had learned from student teaching that were solely based on attendance. She has since tried to adopt assessments that were "more reflective of what the students are actually doing in class."

Conclusion

Assessment was valuable to the choir teacher and the students because it reinforced the primary goal of ensemble achievement and performance. Despite assessment not being a central focus of her energy as teacher, in the formal sense, Ms. Andrews did in fact incorporate a variety of assessment practices into her instruction. These assessment practices were intended to cultivate and evaluate appropriate rehearsal behaviors, to hold students accountable for performance attendance, and to evaluate individual musical skills and knowledge through theory exams and various singing assessments. Participation, attendance, and musical achievement were all critical components of the choral music experience that were being formally and informally assessed, in some capacity, at ATHS.

The primary goal of ensemble achievement was at times in conflict with Ms. Andrews' desire to formally and individually assess students with more consistency and regularity. It was a conflict between value and practice that was complicated by the nature of the choral singing experience, the challenges associated with teaching and assessment in choir, and the external and internal perceptions and expectations for learning and assessment in choir.

The participants' lived experiences of the assessment practices presented in this chapter provided narrative and context that illuminated and reinforced themes unique to teaching, learning, and assessment in music ensemble classes, which were: assessment for ensemble achievement, individually assessing musical skills and knowledge, choir's role in the school curriculum, and challenges impacting assessment in the choral classroom. Discussion of

emerging themes, implications for the field of music education, and suggestions for future research will be discussed in the chapter five.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This instrumental case study explored assessment practices, perceptions of assessment, and factors that influenced assessment in a secondary choral classroom. I examined the beliefs, values, and perceptions of choir students and the choir teacher regarding assessment along with their lived experiences of the various assessment practices in choir. I investigated these assessment practices within a school and classroom context that facilitated and impacted the construction of the beliefs and values of the participants. The interaction of these factors and their relationship to the primary goal of the choral program at ATHS, are illustrated in Figure 1.

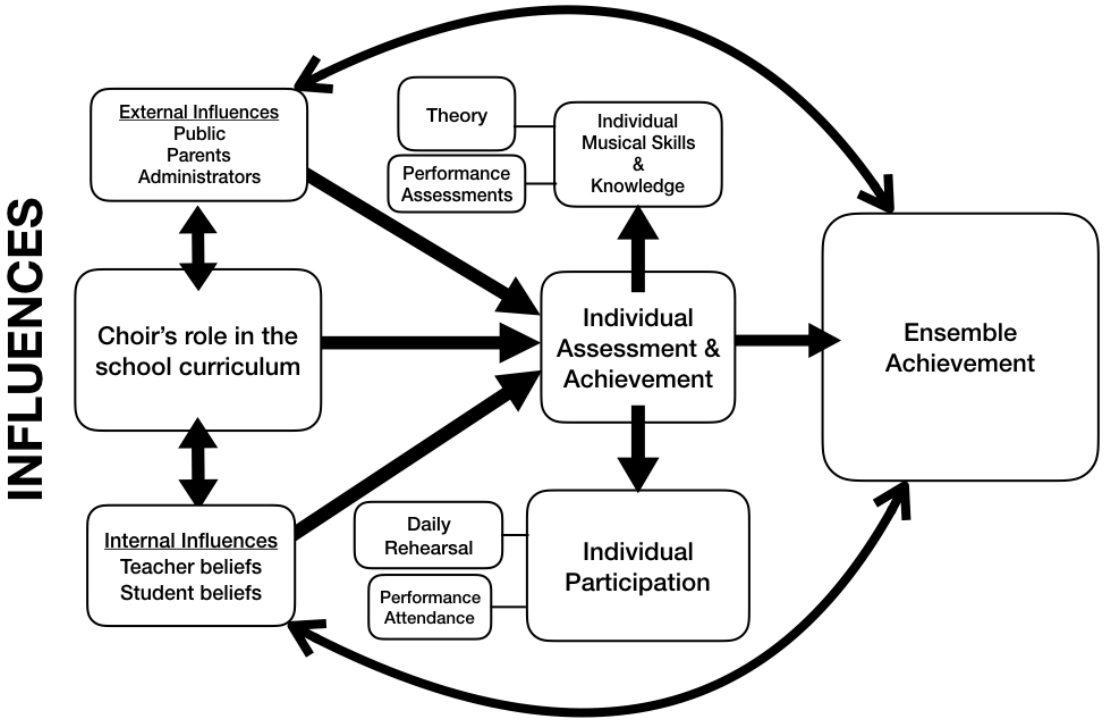

Figure 1. Interactive model of assessment in the secondary choral classroom

The model illustrates the external and internal influences that directly impacted the use of assessment practices at ATHS, while also considering their influence on the choir's role in the school curriculum. Collectively and independently, the three categories of influences impacted assessment: (a) external influences, (b) the choir's role in the school curriculum, and (c) internal influences. Based on those influences, assessment practices were designed to evaluate individual participation and also individual musical skills and knowledge. The model reinforces the relationship between individualized assessment and ensemble achievement in that the individualized assessment practices supported and were essential for accomplishing the primary choral program goal of ensemble achievement. Ensemble achievement, demonstrated through public performances and the experiences of the participants, was then instrumental in shaping the role of choir in the school curriculum and the external and internal perceptions of the choral experience, and thusly, the symbiotic relationship is formed.

Previous research on assessment in music education contexts has largely focused on examining the assessment strategies used in the music ensemble setting (Russell & Austin, 2010; Harrison et al., 2013; McQuarrie & Sherwin, 2013; LaCognata, 2011; Tracy, 2002; McClung, 1996; McCoy, 1991), ensemble teachers' grading practices (Hill, 1999; McClung, 1996; McCoy, 1991), attitudes toward assessment in music classrooms (Kotora, 2005; Talley, 2005; Conway & Jeffers, 2004; McCreary, 2001), and factors that influence assessment music classrooms (Russell & Austin, 2010; Kotora, 2005; Simanton, 2000; Hanzlik, 2001). This research contributed to the existing body of literature by examining the lived assessment experiences of choir students and a choir teacher in a specific context, illuminating how they navigated the tensions and expectations that exist in music ensemble assessment.

This chapter reviews the study's main findings. Findings will be discussed in relation to the research questions that guided the study and related research literature. Additionally, I present implications of this study for music teaching practice and music teacher education

Discussion of Findings

Throughout the course of this study, I sought to identify and explore key experiences, beliefs, and factors that impacted participants' views of and engagement with assessment in the choral classroom. The goal of ensemble achievement was strongly embedded in the choral culture and this goal impacted virtually all components of the participants' choral music experience, including assessment. Individualized assessments were valuable for measuring and reporting student achievement while also supporting and impacting ensemble achievement.

Additionally, I found that the choir's perceived role in the school curriculum, influenced by the external and internal perceptions of the choral learning experience, also impacted the assessment practices used in choir (McClung, 1996; Kotora, 2005). Finally, the challenges unique to music ensemble classrooms, such as time, large class sizes, and efficiency of assessment practices, impacted the use of assessment at ATHS; a finding that substantiates challenges identified in previous studies (Kotora, 2005; Lehman, 2008; Russell & Austin, 2010; Ferm Almqvist et al., 2017). Through engagement with the extant literature, findings were particularly relevant to broader related themes of learning objectives and goals in music education, assessment, and the value of music in schools.

Research question one. The first research question was: *How do participants perceive, value, and experience assessment practices in the choral classroom?*

Participation and attendance. The most frequently used and heavily weighted assessment practices were participation and attendance. Attendance, participation, and attitude

were most commonly used to evaluate students in the music ensemble classroom (McClung, 1996; McCoy, 1991; Russell & Austin, 2010; Tracy, 2002). Similar to choral teachers in other studies (McCoy, 1991; Kotora, 2005; Russell & Austin, 2010), Ms. Andrews relied considerably on these nonmusical assessments to determine grades.

Because ensemble achievement and group instruction were highly valued, the use of these nonmusical assessments was deemed to be appropriate by participants and was also perceived to be a necessary component of the complete choral music experience. This finding was in contrast to McClung (1996) who reported that a majority of choral students preferred music tests and sight-reading assessments over attendance and participation grades.

Scholars have noted the inherent reliability and validity concerns that are involved with using nonmusical criteria to evaluate students in large group settings and the potential negative implications for music educators (Russell, 2011; Harrison et al., 2013). Because participation and attendance assessments reinforced and motivated the cultivation of a productive classroom environment conducive to high levels of ensemble achievement, students in this study did not perceive there to be bias or fairness concerns with these nonmusical criteria contributing substantially to their final grade. This finding differs from the results from Harrison et al., (2013) who found that nonmusical assessments led to perceptions of favoritism and issues of fairness.

Russell & Austin (2010) labeled assessment criteria designed to evaluate participation, attendance, and behavior as "nonachievement criteria" (p. 39). However, the present study casts doubt on labeling these assessment strategies as nonachievement criteria. In this case, students were demonstrating observable skills and understandings about the rehearsal process, namely voice building, posture, facial expression, engagement with the musical score, etc. and other behaviors that were directly related to their individual contribution to the ensemble's

achievement. Therefore, participation assessment at ATHS was understood as evaluating achievement of specific nonmusical skills and observable behaviors. These skills and behaviors demonstrated achievement and mastery of the expectations for meaningful participation in a choral ensemble.

As suggested by Kotora (2005), nonmusical criteria assessment practices, along with musical criteria practices, were viewed as appropriate in this case when validating the use of nonmusical criteria in the choral classroom. Since the concert was a major part of the complete musical learning experience at ATHS, attendance at the concert was essential for students to complete the course requirements and to develop the performance skills necessary for current and future participation in music ensembles.

Performance assessment. In a review of the choral music assessment literature, Henry (2015) suggested, "Choral educators tend to be among the best informal assessors in our schools" (p. 8). Ms. Andrews informally assessed her students' performance daily in her classroom and throughout the rehearsal process. She provided feedback on their performance, communicated outcomes, and adjusted her instruction frequently within each rehearsal. These informal performance assessments were beneficial to Ms. Andrews for evaluating, diagnosing, and correcting ensemble musical performance. But, as Wesolowski (2012) suggested, these practices did not document student learning or progress in a formal or individual way.

Solo and small group singing assessment. This choral program used assessment practices comparable to those identified in previous studies for evaluating performance assessments, such as rubrics (Chiodo, 2001) and checklists (Goolsby, 1999). However, unlike the findings in the Russell & Austin (2010) survey, no performance assessments were used in this case to evaluate

sight reading, memorized performances, improvisation, composition, or to determine student rank or "chair" placement within sections.

While there are reliability concerns about the use of performance assessment to document students' musical achievement (Bergee, 2003; Wesolowski et al., 2018), the communication of evaluative criteria combined with the purpose of the solo singing assessments appeared to eliminate reliability concerns for the participants in this case. The students at ATHS believed that the individual accountability generated through the use of the solo singing assessments had a positive impact on the achievement of the ensemble and therefore, they did not question the fairness or use of this assessment practice.

For the solo recorded and live singing assessments, the students were removed from the ensemble to sing alone, with a small group, or with a recorded track. This task, singing alone, was not authentic to the context in which choristers were accustomed to performing and learning, in a group, and they were not singing and performing in the same manner that they would if they were singing with the ensemble (Daugherty, 2001). Therefore, assessing them on their performance of ensemble repertoire through the use of a solo (live or recorded) singing assessment presented validity concerns that were not identified by the students but were identified by Ms. Andrews and observed throughout the course of data collection.

Contextual, authentic, singing assessment (CASA). In response to the validity concerns identified in using solo singing assessments, Ms. Andrews implemented the CASA to assess and evaluate students' musical understanding and achievement of the ensemble repertoire. To date, there have been no empirical studies that have examined the validity and reliability of a contextual singing assessment. Similar to findings in studies about individualized assessment in music classes, this individual assessment practice enhanced individual musical skills for

performance (Crochet & Green, 2012) and provided information about students' achievement in relation to the authenticity of the teaching and learning process that takes place in this classroom (Scott, 2004). Similar to Demorest's (1998) findings about the motivational effects of individualized sight-singing assessments, students were also highly motivated to improve through the use of CASA; an immediate effect that was observed when students were engaged with this assessment process and the positive change in the ensemble sound.

The implementation of CASA revealed that group achievement (the ensemble sounding good) cannot be declared as evidence of individual student learning (students' vocal skill and knowledge of their part). This study affirms that group achievement is not necessarily an authentic representation of individual achievement in choral contexts (Henry & Demorest, 1994). This is an important distinction that had a direct impact on Ms. Andrews' approach to instruction and understanding of achievement in choir by reinforcing the importance of individualized assessment and its impact on ensemble achievement. CASA and the other forms of singing assessments, when implemented regularly, could create opportunities to document and track individual vocal development over time; a use that aligns with practices suggested in the literature for generating longitudinal data of student progress (Wesolowski, 2015; Crochet & Green, 2012; Scott, 1998).

TheoryGO. The theory curriculum at ATHS utilized the more traditional pen and paper assessment format that has commonly been used in music classrooms to evaluate music content knowledge (Russell & Austin, 2010). Comparable to students in previous studies (McClung, 1996), students in the present study perceived the theory curriculum to be a suitable assessment practice and one that supported ensemble achievement through the transfer of music content knowledge. Students were motivated to get good grades on their theory tests; echoing a similar

finding in previous research about the motivational power of grades in music classrooms (Hill, 1999).

Research question two. *What factors influenced participants' perceptions, expectations, beliefs, and experiences of assessment in the choral classroom?* Participants' perceptions and beliefs about assessment were influenced by (a) the choir's elective designation, (b) the internal and external perceptions of the choral music classroom experience as an activity, and (c) the perception of choir as an easy A.

Teachers of elective subjects have been reported to grant higher grades that tend to be based on nonachievement criteria (Johnson, 2008). Expectations for assessment in choir was consistent with previous research finding pressure from students, administrators, and parents that choir grades be high (McClung, 1996). This expectation, supported by the grades the students actually received, perpetuated the perception about choir being an easy A. Students indicated that their parents were only concerned about their choir grade when it wasn't an A. Students also reported that their parents demonstrated a genuine interest in the achievement of the ensemble and tasks associated with performing, but showed a lack of interest in the specifics of their individual grade reports for choir. This finding supports the perceived apathy of parents and administrators about assessment that was found to impact the assessment decisions of music ensemble teachers (McClung, 1996; Kotora, 2005)

Kotora (2005) noted the frustrations of music teachers in reconciling the expectations for high grades and the social/personal benefits experienced in choir with the need for measuring individual achievement and skill development in order to be accountable for student grades. Ms. Andrews experienced similar frustrations as she worked to meet expectations for documenting

individual achievement without sacrificing the collaborative and interactive environment that the students valued and desired as a part of their choral music experience.

The tensions in this case between administrators and music educators concerning implementing assessment, and the lack of administrator guidance and involvement, echoes previous research (McCoy, 1991; McClung, 1996; Kotora, 2005; Russell & Austin; 2010). These tensions were illuminated in the present study when the district implemented common assessments across grade levels and disciplines but denied funding to the high school choral programs to implement their own common assessments. The denial of the request points to other findings that administrators valued the adoption and implementation of valid assessment strategies but excluded music courses (McCoy, 1991; Russell & Austin, 2010). Such was the case at ATHS where Ms. Andrews was given complete autonomy of her assessment decisions and there was a lack of administrative involvement.

Similar to previous findings, assessment practices at ATHS were influenced by the public's perception of the choral program's role in the school (McClung, 1996; Duerksen, 1995). Perceptions of musical achievement were impacted through the choir's well attended and valued public performances. Researchers, such as Denis (2018), suggested that the use of nonmusical criteria-based assessments had the potential to negatively influence the public's perception of the rigor of the school music program. However, it was the use of nonmusical assessments (participation and attendance) that, in this case, was perceived to positively contribute to the public's perception of this choral program. The visibility of the choir at ATHS, through their well-attended public performances, reinforced the value of participation and attendance by regularly putting them on display. Their high-quality performances, a demonstration of ensemble achievement, shaped the public's understanding and appreciation of the choral music program.

The pressure to present quality performances was deeply engrained in the music education culture at ATHS and performance expectations were influential for how assessment took place in the choral classroom (Russell & Austin, 2010; Kotora, 2005; McClung, 1996). Performance demands have been identified as an external influence that may create conflict with the teacher's beliefs about and adoption of assessment practices (Kancianic, 2006). While Ms. Andrews believed that assessment was important and necessary, the performance demands she experienced limited her use and frequency of formalized assessment practices.

Public display of achievement through performances reinforced the perception held by students that choir was more an activity and less an academic endeavor because individual achievement in choir was perceived to directly affect the achievement of the ensemble and in turn the success of their peers. In contrast, students reported that their individual achievement in required, academic classes was different because individual effort and achievement did not affect their peers in those classes. Students in choral ensembles were motivated by their peers to strive for higher levels of achievement (Adderley et al., 2003). The pride experienced by students' collective accomplishments influenced achievement in other areas of their lives and schooling (Parker, 2014) For some students, choir was what motivated them to come to school or to apply themselves in their required classes so that they could continue to participate in choir. These differences in the ways that students learn and demonstrate achievement in choir versus other classes impacted their beliefs about what was appropriate assessment in choir.

That choir was different from required courses and even from other electives was an important finding impacting the use of assessment and perceptions of assessment in the choral classroom at ATHS, which aligned with previous research that suggested that this distinction influenced administrator and student expectations (McClung, 1996), impacted parent's perceived

expectations for grading (Conway & Jeffers, 2004), and shaped the teacher's philosophy of assessment (Tracy, 2002). The perception that choir was easy was rooted in the comparisons that students, parents, and administrators formed between assessment in choir and assessment in required courses, the high percentage of students that receive A's, and the belief that choir is not a real class because students are just singing. Considering the deficit in knowledge that the general public has demonstrated about the learned, psychomotor skills that are involved with singing and music making (Demorest & Pfordresher, 2015), choir could appear to be easy by comparison to more individualized and objectives forms of assessment and the academic expectations that students described for their required (nonelective) courses.

Research question three. *What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing and engaging with assessment in the choral music classroom?* Surveys of music educators identified a number of logistical and curricular challenges that consistently hindered music ensemble teachers' attempts to accurately and reliably assess the individual achievement of their students. Lack of instructional time, time to evaluate assessments, large class sizes, efficiency and efficacy of assessment strategies, inadequate training in assessment techniques, and addressing differences in student skill levels were among some of the challenges that have been identified (McClung, 1996; Tracy, 2002; Kotora, 2005; Henry, 2015).

A number of these assessment challenges existed at ATHS. The lack of instructional time was cited as a significant assessment challenge for Ms. Andrews, which is consistent with previous findings (Tracy, 2002; Kotora, 2005). This issue was compounded by the students' lack of music instruction prior to their participation in choir at ATHS. Ms. Andrews felt pressured to use instructional time to teach and reinforce basic musical concepts and skills while also rehearsing and preparing for performances.

The vulnerability of singing and the human connection that singers experience with their voice was evident throughout the CASA process and emerged as a challenge that impacted the use of the assessment practice. As the frequency of CASA submissions increased, the levels of uncertainty and anxiousness decreased in students. Echoing the suggestions of Osborne & Kenny (2008) for combatting music performance anxiety in adolescents, Mrs. Andrews was intentional about creating a safe and encouraging learning environment and she also communicated specific, useful, and appropriate feedback for individuals.

The inherent nature of choral music participation, which has traditionally focused on ensemble achievement over individual achievement also created challenges for choral music educators. Similar to Parker's (2014) findings about the development of ensemble identity, measuring the contribution of each individual in terms of musical skill and knowledge to the collective performance (ensemble's achievement) was of lower priority than collective achievement and the desire to cultivate ensemble identity. Instrumental ensemble classrooms use of graded method books, the availability of extra staffing and personnel, and the inherent ensemble structure (numerous sections/parts and traditional ranking of student skill within sections) is more conducive to individualized assessment (Simanton, 2000; Henry, 2015). The use of these types of individual and small group assessments are not as common in choral settings most likely due to the lack of staffing and personnel resources needed to supervise and evaluate pull out, individual assessments and the shortage of instructional time (Tracy, 2002).

CASA was shown to address a significant concern of music educators and their use of instructional time for assessment. Implementation of the CASA strategy did not require students to be sequestered to a practice room nor did it create classroom management challenges that often arise when individuals are assessed outside of the context of the ensemble (Tracy, 2002;

Kotora, 2005). As an embedded assessment practice, the use of CASA was not perceived to interrupt the rehearsal process or to take away from instructional time because but instead it reinforced and supported the learning that took place in the rehearsal leading up the assessment.

Nonetheless, while the CASA strategy did not take away from instructional time, the time spent gathering, organizing, and evaluating submissions was substantial. Scholars have suggested that technology should be considered as a solution to the logistical challenges, such as time constraints, that plague music educators' use of assessment (Nielson, 2011; Pellegrino, Conway, & Russell, 2015). It was revealed throughout the course of this study that the use of technology to assess students individually potentially required more instructional time up front to teach students how to record and submit their recordings, particularly when first using a digital submission platform for the assessment. When compared to the collective time it would take to for each student to either sing alone for the teacher or to leave the ensemble to go record a solo singing assessment, the implications for time saved through the use of technology were noteworthy.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further action research and case study research is needed to explore exemplar teachers and models, like Ms. Andrews, who are experimenting with emerging assessment practices in an effort to improve music educators' understanding of the "real life" factors and influences that impact assessment decisions.

Numerous scholars have called for teacher training programs and institutions to evaluate and revise their music education curricula to include assessment topics and strategies and for improved professional development opportunities for teachers to engage with best practices in assessment (Kotora, 2005; Henry, 2015; Russell & Austin, 2010). Studies are needed to

investigate and identify assessment concepts that are being taught at the collegiate level and to determine if they are aligned with current practices in music education; including the terminology used, philosophical considerations, and strategies for reporting and interpreting data. Additionally, studies that analyze professional development offerings on the topic of assessment would provide useful data for understanding the narrative and discussions surrounding assessment in professional organizations.

The impact of technology on assessment in music education, specifically in choral contexts, is a topic that is relatively new and is one the permits further examination to identify and analyze technology-assisted assessment practices in music. The use of smartphones to record CASA proved to be a useful and efficient strategy for capturing student data at ATHS. By exploring other uses of personal devices, along with computer-based and web-based assessment strategies, researchers can equip practitioners with reliable and appropriate assessment practices that eliminate some of the logistical challenges associated with assessment in choir. An investigation into the effect of SES, school demographics, and funding of the use of technology-assisted assessments would also yield useful information for teachers in the field.

Finally, studies that examine the tensions that exist among music educators along with the beliefs and values of administrators and parents, and the lived experiences of students engaged in assessment in the choral classroom are necessary to provide context to the current narrative about assessment practices in music education. Because a majority of the information available to choral music teachers on assessment comes from practitioner articles and position pieces written in professional journals that seem to be centered more on opinions and experiences rather than on research data (Kotora, 2005), qualitative studies, including multiple

case or cross-case studies, that examine these opinions and experiences could further examine many of the tensions and conflicts that exist about assessment in music ensemble classrooms.

Conclusions and Implications for Music Education

Paul Lehman's pioneering publication, *Tests and Measurement in Music* (1968), served as a call to music educators who were seeking, at the height of the post-Sputnik era, to understand the importance of measurement and evaluation in music classrooms across the country. But over fifty years later, professional dialogue remains largely unchanged as music educators continue to search for answers to the many questions about music assessment. Through initiatives, such as the Model Cornerstone Assessments (2018), and revisions of national and state standards (NCAS, 2014), music educators have positioned themselves, although with varied success, to argue that music possesses merit as a necessary curricular component in American public schools.

Increased teacher accountability and data-driven assessment has impacted student evaluation, especially in nonelective courses, across the United States, which has created additional pressures on teachers of elective courses. But the music education profession has been unable to agree about what to teach, how to teach it, and perhaps most importantly, how to identify and implement assessment practices that consistently measure student achievement. This lack of direction among music educators likely will remain an increasing concern as the need to document student learning outcomes becomes even more consequential.

The findings of the present study, like the many investigations that preceded it, shed light on some core difficulties that are associated with music assessment. For example, at ATHS, there were few administrative expectations that Ms. Andrews produce or submit documentation of individual student learning, other than the summative grade that students received at the end of

each grading period. She was, however, ethically compelled to implement assessments because they supported, in her mind and in the minds of her students, the goals that she developed for her choral music classes. The learning outcomes associated with such goals generally aligned with state and national standards.

In an attempt to create assessments in widely diverse classes, Ms. Andrews, like many if not most music teachers across the country relied heavily on assessments of nonmusical criteria—primarily participation and attendance. Such evaluations, though not specifically connected to music knowledge learning outcomes, were perceived by Ms. Andrews, her students, and their parents to be appropriate and to support the ATHS music program goals, which primarily were associated with ensemble success and the cultivation of a life-long love of music. In short, this study strongly suggests that the various concerns about the validity and reliability of Ms. Andrews' nonmusical assessment practices were superseded by the participants' beliefs that nonmusical assessments were relevant to learning in this context.

The lived experiences, perceptions, and beliefs investigated in this study illuminated the many tensions that exist in a profession that seeks to be a valued part of the academic community while honoring the large-group ensemble tradition that remains rooted in our music education culture. This conflict is further confounded by attempts to reconcile the nature of teaching and learning in choir with calls to adopt achievement criteria assessments that mirror individual assessment practices in other content areas.

The findings of this study did not specifically call into question the value of individualized achievement criteria assessment practices or the importance of acquiring musical skills and knowledge. It provided, however, a rationale for practitioners and researchers to develop, re-examine, and identify assessment practices that are relevant to the types of skills and

knowledge that are valued in traditional ensemble settings. By attempting to reform the performance-based ensemble model to one that more easily conforms to assessment norms in education, music educators are at risk of disregarding the value of participation, attendance, and the notion of team effort that was found, in this case, to be both relevant and foundational to the students' positive experiences in choir.

In sum, the notion that assessment must be musical and achievement-based to be relevant in ensemble settings, clearly the majority of ATHS choral music courses, was not supported by the participants. Nonachievement evaluations were valued as a necessary part of the cultivation of the broad range of skills and dispositions that were fundamental to singing in choir. In short, this study revealed that assessment primarily was a tool to support the corporate goals of the choir classes, to perform musical selections at the highest level possible. That choir participation was positively perceived to be more like an activity and less like an academic class appeared to be a core belief at ATHS, and one that should be further examined in assessment discussions in music education.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA | Office of the Vice President for Research & Economic Development
Office for Research Compliance

September 24, 2018

Elizabeth Hearn
School of Music
Box 870366

Re: IRB#: 18-OR-256 "Assessment and Individual Student Achievement in the Choral Classroom: A Case Study"

Dear Elizabeth Hearn:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on July 10, 2019. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent/assent forms to provide to your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer

358 Rose Administration Building | Box 870127 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127
205-348-8461 | Fax 205-348-7189 | Toll Free 1-877-820-3066

APPENDIX B

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Study title: Contextual Assessment in the Choral Classroom
Investigator: Elizabeth R. Hearn, PhD student, University of Alabama

You are being asked for permission to take part in a research study.

This study is called Contextual Assessment in the Choral Classroom. The study is being done by Elizabeth Hearn who is a graduate student at the University of Alabama. Ms. Hearn is being supervised by Dr. Marvin Latimer who is a professor of music education at the University of Alabama.

This study is being done to examine students' and teachers' perceptions of and experiences with assessment in choir, specifically with a contextual singing assessment strategy. This knowledge is important and useful because it will help to identify issues of equity, student achievement, and self-awareness in the assessment processes that have been or will be implemented in the choral classroom. The results of this study will inform music educators' understanding of assessment, specifically authentic assessment strategies in the choral classroom.

You have been asked to be in this study because you are a teacher of record for choral courses at TCHS. Along with you, the teacher, approximately 150 students will participate in this study.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

- -Agree to being observed in your naturalistic, every day class environment
- -Participate in one-on-one interviews with the investigator.
- -Keep memos and field notes related to assessment.
- -Observe and document classroom procedures and processes related to assessment.
- -Provide assessment related documents and artifacts to the investigator.

Some additional time, outside of the regular class meeting time, could be required by participating in the study. Participants will not be compensated for being in this study. However, the investigator will provide a pizza and ice cream party at the end of the semester as a thank you to those who participated in the study.

There are no risks associated with participating in this study. Privacy of the participants choosing to participate in the one-on-one interviews will be protected by interviewing participants in a private room or a site of their own choosing and telling them in advance what they will be asked about.

All participants confidentiality is protected by separating signed consents from data sheets, using pseudonyms, restricting the number of people who can access data, and destroying raw data or identifiers after data have been entered. For the student focus groups, I will request for people to keep the discussion confidential but I cannot guarantee this will happen. I will also have access to confidential student information collected and stored using the online course portal. That information includes: student singing assessment recordings, student self-assessment forms, teacher feedback forms, and student grade reports.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you starts the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your or their relations with the University of Alabama or Tuscaloosa County High School.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board ("the IRB") is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call the investigator - Libby Hearn, 205-348-0393 or email at erhearn@crimson.ua.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Marvin Latimer by phone 348-0393 or by email - mlatimer@music.ua.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email the Research Compliance office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

At completion of the study, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to allow my child to participate. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ _____

Signature of Research Participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 9/24/18
EXPIRATION DATE: 7/10/2019

APPENDIX C

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

You are being asked to give permission for your child, for whom you are a guardian/legal representative, to take part in a research study.

This study is called Contextual Assessment in the Choral Classroom. The study is being done by Elizabeth Hearn who is a graduate student at the University of Alabama. Ms. Hearn is being supervised by Dr. Marvin Latimer who is a professor of music education at the University of Alabama.

This study is being done to examine students perceptions of and experiences with assessment in choir, specifically with a contextual singing assessment strategy. This knowledge is important and useful because it will help to identify issues of equity, student achievement, and self-awareness in the assessment processes that have been or will be implemented in the choral classroom. The results of this study will inform music educators' understanding of assessment, specifically authentic assessment strategies in the choral classroom.

Your child has been asked to be in this study because they are a student that is currently enrolled in a choir class at . Approximately 150 students will participate in this study.

If the student meets the criteria and agree for your child to be in this study, they will be asked to do these things:

-Agree to being observed in your naturalistic, every day class environment
-Students who are interested may choose to participate in a group discussion.
-A select number of students who participated in the group discussion will be invited to participate in one-on-one interviews with the investigator.

Students will receive assent forms during their choir class time and the investigator will discuss the study with them and answer any student questions or concerns at that time.

No additional time, outside of the regular class meeting time, will be required by participating in the study. Therefore, it will not cost you or your student anything to participate in the study. Participants will not be compensated for being in this study. However, the investigator will provide a pizza and ice cream party at the end of the semester as a thank you to those who participated in the study.

There are no risks associated with participating in this study. Privacy of the participants choosing to participate in the one-on-one interviews will be protected by interviewing participants in a private room or a site of their own choosing and telling them in advance what they will be asked about.

All participants confidentiality is protected by separating signed consents from data sheets, using pseudonyms, restricting the number of people who can access data, and destroying raw data or identifiers after data have been entered. For the focus groups, I will request for people to keep

the discussion confidential but I cannot guarantee this will happen. I will also have access to confidential student information collected and stored using the online course portal. That information includes: student singing assessment recordings, student self-assessment forms, teacher feedback forms, and student grade reports.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is you and your child's free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If your child starts the study, they can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your or their relations with the University of Alabama or Tuscaloosa County High School.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board ("the IRB") is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call the investigator - Libby Hearn, 205-348-0393 or email at erhearn@crimson.ua.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Marvin Latimer by phone 348-0393 or by email - mlatimer@music.ua.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email the Research Compliance office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

At completion of the study, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to allow my child to participate. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ _____

Signature of Research Participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 9|24|18
EXPIRATION DATE: 9|10|2019

APPENDIX D

ASSENT FORM

Dear Student:

I am from the University of Alabama. I am doing a study of how students in a choral music class/ ensemble perceive, value, and experience assessment and specific assessment strategies. I'm also interested to explore your perceived individual achievement in choir and how assessment plays a role in that achievement. In discussing your experiences, thoughts, and feelings I hope to be able to better understand the role of assessment and how to refine and expand the current strategies to better suit the needs of the individual choristers.

Your parents were informed about the details of this study and provided consent your participation in this study. In other words, they know we are asking you to be in this study and it is OK with them. Students not choosing to participate in the study will still be expected to fulfill the requirements and tasks associated with being a student in the class.

If you decide to be in the study, you will be observed, over the course of the semester, as you engage with and participate in assessment experiences. Volunteers from each choir will form a discussion group at school, to be held during class time, with other students from the same class/ choir. You will be asked to talk about assessment, grading, and evaluation in choir. These discussion groups will take place every month for 3 months— 3 times in all. I will send a reminder for each meeting. From the discussion groups, I will identify and invite individuals to participate in one-on-one interviews where we will continue to deconstruct and explore themes and topics that emerged in the discussion groups. If selected to take part in the interviews, there will be three individual interviews over the course of 3 months.

I will make an audio recording of the meetings and interviews so that I have an accurate record of the discussion. These recordings will be typed up after the meeting but no names will be used. The recordings will be destroyed as soon as the typed record is made. If you do not want to be in a recorded discussion, you should not participate in the discussion groups or individual interviews.

We will not tell anyone outside the study what you or any other particular person said. We will write a report on the study that just talks about what the group said or didn't say, but no one will be able to recognize you. We will ask students in the groups not to talk about what was said outside of the meetings (to keep the discussion confidential) but we cannot promise this. You can control this by not saying something you would not want to have repeated. We will not tell your parents or teachers what you said.

All participants confidentiality is protected by separating signed consents from data sheets, using pseudonyms, restricting the number of people who can access data, and destroying raw data or identifiers after data have been entered. For the focus groups, I will request for people to keep the discussion confidential but I cannot guarantee this will happen. I will also have access to your confidential student information, which is collected and stored using the online course portal. That information includes: student singing assessment recordings, student self-assessment forms, teacher feedback forms, and student grade reports.

You are a volunteer. You are helping us but you do not have to unless you want to. This is your free choice. If you start the study and decide you don't want to continue, just let me know. No one will be mad at you. If you do not want to talk about a certain topic in the discussions or answer a certain question, you do not have to.

We do not think there are any risks or harm to you in this study. You may find the discussions helpful to you or it may make you feel good to know that your contribution allows the researcher to make meaning of our conversations in order to contribute something substantial to the music education profession.

If you have any questions about this study, please ask me now. If you have questions later, you can call Libby Hearn at the University of Alabama at 348-0393. You can also ask your parents questions if you wish. If you have questions or concerns about your rights in a research study, please contact Ms. Tanta Myles, the University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at (205) 348-8461.

If you agree to be in this study, please sign your name on this letter below. You can have a copy of the letter to keep.

Thank you very much for your interest.

Sincerely,

Libby Hearn, Investigator

_____ _____

Name of Participant Date

_____ _____

Person Obtaining Consent Date

UA IRB Approved Document
Approval date: 9/24/18
Expiration date: 7/10/2019

APPENDIX E

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Teacher Interview Guide

Introduction:

Welcome! Thank you for talking with me today. As you know, I am currently in the process of gathering data that will be used to describe the use and perceptions of assessment in this choral classroom.

In this interview, I am interested gaining a deeper understanding of your perceptions of assessment strategies and practices in the choral classroom. Over the next 45–60 minutes, I will ask you some questions about your experiences with assessment in choir. If you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you are welcome to pass on the question. If you need a break, please let me know. I am using an audio recorder and my laptop to record this interview. I will also use a pseudonym (or different name) in my interview transcript to protect your identity.

Do you have any questions? If there are no questions, let's get started!

Interview Questions:

1) So, let's begin by just a brief introduction of your educational background and your history at ATHS.
2) How many total years of experience do you have as a music teacher?
3) How much training would you say you've had in assessment tools and strategies?
4) What do you consider to be the purpose of assessment in your classroom?
5) What makes choir different from other classes? Or is it?
6) When you were in school, how were you assessed in music classes?
7) How did you earn grades in other traditional, academic classes?
8) Why do you think evaluation and assessment is different for choir class or ensemble music classes?
9) What external factors have influenced the way you understand, value, and implement assessment in your classes?
   Teacher training (courses)
   Professional Development, Colleagues?
   School and District Expectations
   Parent Expectations

10) What internal or intrinsic factors have influenced the way you understand, value, and implement assessment in your classes?
    Personal motivation style
    Goals for program
11) Have you experienced any fairness issues when giving a grade based on nonachievement criteria in choir (such as attendance) where a student was potentially penalized for something that was beyond their control? If so, share.
12) How do your students know if they are doing "good" in choir?
    Follow-up – what does achievement look like in choir?
13) What are some examples of student goals and objectives? How do you communicate those goals?
14) In what ways are students able to know if you are improving in this choir? Regression?
15) How would students know in other classes if you they were passing or failing or their level of achievement?
16) What are some assessment strategies or practices that would consider to be widely and commonly used in ensemble classes? Are any of those unique or more commonly used in choral music settings?
17) Do you think the way we have traditionally approached assessment in performance classes has influenced the public's perceptions of the value of high school choral performance classes?
18) How would you categorize your assessment practices?
19) What comes to mind when I mention the term alternative assessment? Authentic assessment? Performance assessment?
    Follow-up: respond and continue to explore feelings related to each type of assessment
20) So, this setting is unique because you have adopted assessment practices using both the commonly used noncognitive or nonmusical criteria but also you use alternative approaches to assessment in which students' skills and knowledge are assessed in a more formal way. Can you speak to each of these practices and share how you came to value you these particular assessment strategies and how you use them to evaluate students?
    Theory test
    Participation and attendance
    Singing tests
    Group assessment (performance reflections?)
    Writing assignments?
21) Which forms of assessment receive the most weight? The least? Why?
22) Which assessment practice is the most useful to you as the teacher?
23) What challenges have you experienced when implementing or developing assessment strategies?
24) How much are your decisions influenced by administrators or district policy? Do you perceive that your administrators have a vested interest in the assessment practices you choose to use? Do they provide guidance for other courses or teachers in adopting assessment practices?

25) What do you perceive to be the level of interest of your students' parents related to their child's achievement or their growth in choir? Do you think they care? What information do you perceive to be relevant to them?
26) Do you use technology when assessing students? How? What specific technology or digital programs have you used when assessing students? Are there any district mandates for incorporating technology into the classroom?
27) Have the national standards influenced the way you assess student learning?
28) If you were to be graded on your singing, would you prefer to be graded on how you sing alone or how you sing with the group? Why?
    Follow-up: Explore feelings related to solo singing vs. group singing
29) Do you currently assess students individually? How? When?
30) How do you know the ways in which each individual is contributing to the overall ensemble sound?
31) How does individual student data inform your teaching? Inform evaluative decisions? Inform ensemble selection or placement?
32) Do students receive feedback on their individual achievement? If so, in what ways?
33) What are specific challenges or what affects your use of individually assessing students in the choral, ensemble classroom?
34) What other thoughts do you have about assessment or achievement in choir?
35) Is there anything I did not ask that you would like to share?

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Focus Group Interview Guide

Introduction:

Welcome! Thank you for talking with me today.

I am a graduate student at the University of Alabama conducting a study here at AT High to explore the assessment practices used in this choral classroom. In this interview, I am interested in learning/understanding your perceptions of assessment practices used in the choral classroom. Over the next few minutes, I will ask you some questions about your experiences with assessment in choir and generally in your schooling. If you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you are welcome to pass on the question. If you need a break, please let me know. I am using an audio recorder and my laptop to record this interview. I will also use a pseudonym (or different name) in my interview transcript to protect your identity.

Do you have any questions? If there are no questions, let's get started!

Interview Questions:

1) Please state your grade and how many years you have been in choir?

2) Why did you choose to participate in choir?

3) What makes choir different from other classes? Or is it?

4) What comes to mind when you think of term 'assessment?'

5) How are you assessed in other classes?

6) How are you assessed in choir?

7) What are students' expectations for their grade in choir? Why? Do you agree?

8) Which assessment practices are used most frequently in choir?

9) Why do you think evaluation and assessment is different for choir class or performance-based music classes?

10) Which assessment practices do you think provide the most useful feedback for your individual musical growth, learning, and achievement?

11) Does a grade or assessment based on attendance or participation communicate information about your individual musical growth or achievement? How so?

12) Have you or anyone you know experienced any fairness issues with your grade in choir? If so, share.

13) What do you think is the best way to assess students in choir? What do you think your parents think? Do they care?

14) How would you know in other classes if you were passing/failing or your level of achievement?

15) How do you know if you are doing "good" in choir?
    a. Follow-up – what does achievement look like in choir?
    b. What are some examples of student goals?

16) In what ways are you able to know if you are improving in choir? Regressing?

17) What are your general thoughts on theory tests?
    a. Follow-up - structure, motivational influences, transfer to singing

18) What comes to mind when I mention the term performance assessment?
    a. Follow-up: respond and continue to explore feeling related to PA (singing tests)

19) If you were to be graded on your singing, would you prefer to be graded on how you sing alone or how you sing with the group? Why?
    a. Follow-up: Explore feelings related to solo singing vs. group singing

20) What other thoughts do you have about assessment or achievement in choir?

21) Is there anything I did not ask that you would like to share?

APPENDIX G

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Questions

1. What grade are you in?
2. When did you start singing in a school choir?
3. Which choirs do you currently sing in?
4. How does singing in choir fit into your overall educational experience and goals?
5. Why did you make the decision to join choir?
6. What were your expectations of what you would learn in choir before you joined?
7. Did those expectations change and if so, how?

Skills and Knowledge Questions

1. What skills have you developed or cultivated during your time in choir?
    a. Musical?
    b. Social?
    c. Interpersonal?
    d. Other?
2. What knowledge have you gained from being in choir?
3. How do you know that you have learned what you say you have learned?
4. Do your parents know or care about what you have learned/are learning in choir?
    a. If yes, how do they know?
    b. If no, why?
5. How do you think your skills correlate to the overall success of the ensemble?

Assessment Questions

1. Are any of the skills or knowledge that you mentioned assessed in a formal way in choir (in other words, you get a grade for it)?
    a. Discuss each of the different forms of assessment.
2. Do those assessments inform your understanding of your individual progress or growth as a musician/singer?
    a. Follow-up – why or why not?
3. Have you looked at your grade report for this nine-weeks? (Look at it together)
    a. What does it communicate about your achievement in choir?
    b. What does it not communicate about your achievement in choir?
4. Concert grade

    a. Reflect on your concert experience.
        i. What does your concert grade represent?
        ii. Does the grade or assessment of the concert influence your engagement with the concert or your individual performance?
5. Participation grade
    a. Reflect on your participation in choir.
        i. How do you get points off of participation?
        ii. Do you know if you get points taken off?
        iii. What does that grade represent?
6. Let's talk about theory. Share with me your experience and thoughts about theory.
    a. Levels
    b. Individualized/self-guided instruction
    c. Structure of choirs and theory achievement
    d. Transfer to singing/choral ensemble
7. Let's talk about singing assessments. You have done two this past semester. One was a solo recording and the other was recording while singing with the choir.
    a. Have you listened to either of those submissions? Thoughts?
    b. Can you share what your experience was like in completing each of those singing assessments?
    c. Let's listen and I want you to write down your thoughts as we listen and then we will talk about them.
        i. Solo
        ii. CASA
    d. Which recording do you think was the most authentic representation of your voice and singing achievement? Why?
    e. What do you perceive to be the value of Ms. Andrews conducting these assessments?
        i. Do you perceive them to be valuable?
        ii. Is one more valuable than the other? Why?
8. Of all of the different types of singing assessment used in choir (small group live, solo live, solo recorded, CASA recorded) which do you prefer as an assessment of you as an individual?
    a. Why?
    b. What are the attributes of the other forms of assessment that makes them less desirable or appropriate?
9. How does assessment in choir differ from your other classes in school?
10. Are you graded on participation or attendance in any of your other classes?
11. Why? Do you think its graded in choir?
12. What aspects of the current assessment plan are most effective for documenting and encouraging individual achievement?
    a. Ensemble achievement?
13. If you could make any changes to the current assessments or grading policy in choir what would it be?
14. Do you have any other thoughts about assessment in choir?